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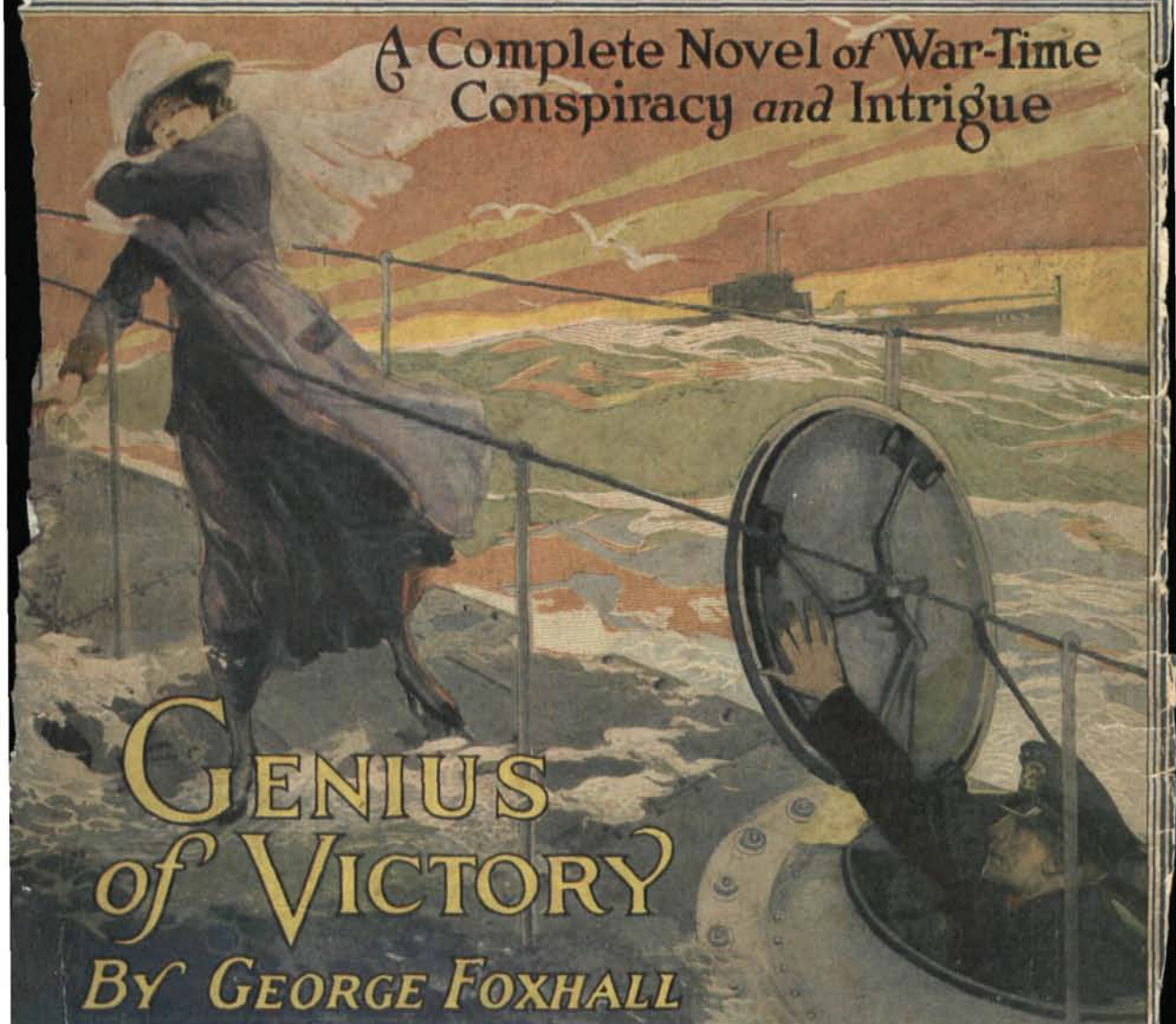

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By GEORGE FOXHALL

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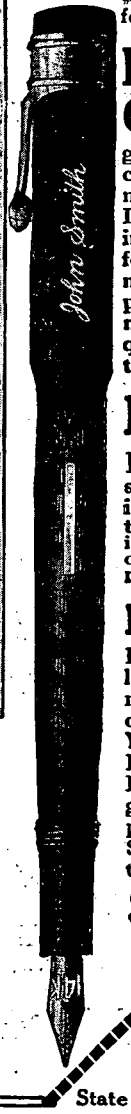

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THE ARGOSY

ISSUED WEEKLY

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in next week's Argosy and find that there is still something new to tell about the roped ring. A great new serial begins in this issue for November 10. Read particulars on it and concerning the other budget of good things to come in The Argosy's Log-Book on page 189.

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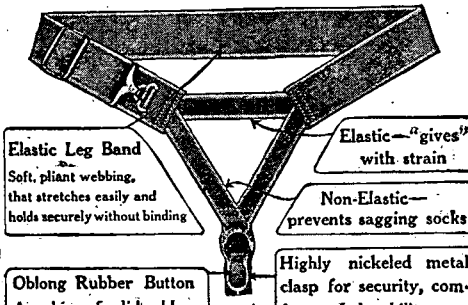
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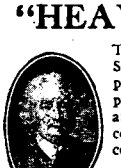

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Tobacco Tells on Nervous System
Tobacco Ruins Digestion
Tobacco Stunts Boy's Growth
Tobacco Robs Man of Virility
Tobacco Steals from You the Pleasures, Comforts, Luxuries of Life

Tobacco Habit Banished In 48 to 72 Hours

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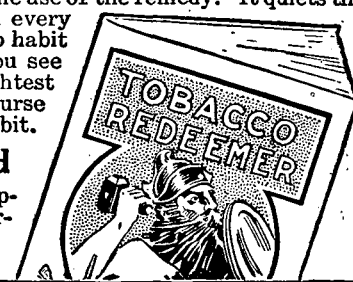
Trying to quit the tobacco habit unaided is a losing fight against heavy odds, and means a serious shock to your nervous system. So don't try it! Make the tobacco habit quit you. It will quit you if you will just take Tobacco Redeemer according to directions.

It doesn't make a particle of difference whether you've been a user of tobacco for a single month or 50 years, or how much you use, or in what form you use it. Whether you smoke cigars, cigarettes, pipe, chew plug or fine cut or use snuff—**Tobacco Redeemer** will positively remove all craving for tobacco in any form in from 48 to 72 hours. Your tobacco craving will begin to decrease after the very first dose—there's no long waiting for results.

Tobacco Redeemer contains no habit-forming drugs of any kind and is the most marvelously quick, absolutely scientific and thoroughly reliable remedy for the tobacco habit.

Not a Substitute

Tobacco Redeemer is in no sense a substitute for tobacco, but is a radical, efficient treatment. After finishing the treatment you have absolutely no desire to use tobacco again or to continue the use of the remedy. It quiets the nerves, and will make you feel better in every way. If you really want to quit the tobacco habit—get rid of it so completely that when you see others using it, it will not awaken the slightest desire in you—you should at once begin a course of **Tobacco Redeemer** treatment for the habit.



Results Absolutely Guaranteed

A single trial will convince the most skeptical. Our legal, binding, money-back guarantee goes with each full treatment. If **Tobacco Redeemer** fails to banish the tobacco habit when taken according to the plain and easy directions, your money will be cheerfully refunded upon demand.

Let Us Send You Convincing Proof

If you're a slave of the tobacco habit and want to find a sure, quick way of quitting "for keeps" you owe it to yourself and to your family to mail the coupon below or send your name and address on a postal and receive our **free** booklet on the deadly effect of tobacco on the human system, and positive proof that **Tobacco Redeemer** will quickly free you from the habit.

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Dept. 320 St. Louis, Mo.

Free Book Coupon

NEWELL PHARMACAL CO.,
Dept. 320 St. Louis, Mo.

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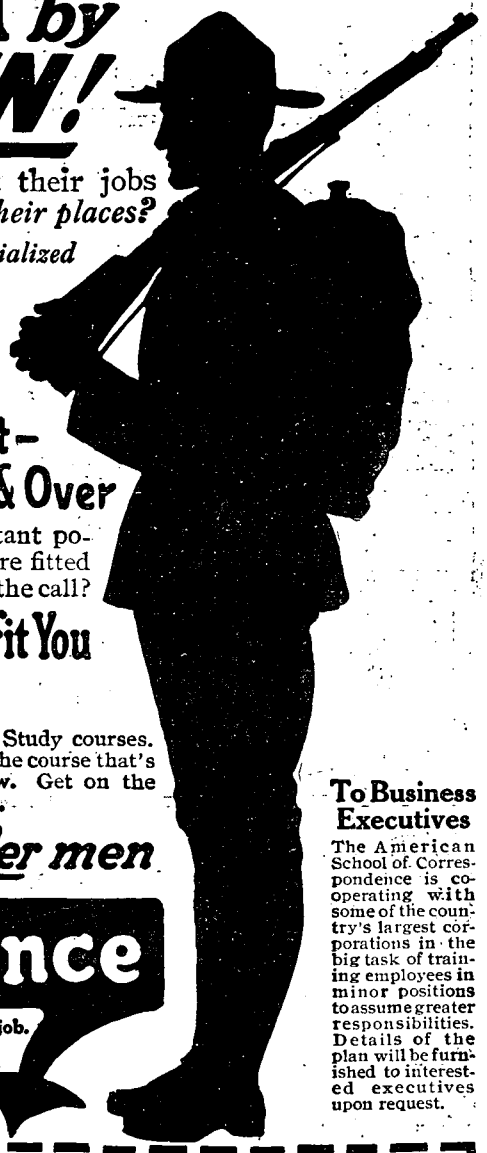
The Jobs They've Left Must be Filled *by* TRAINED MEN!



Great numbers of *trained men* have quit their jobs to join the fighting forces. *Who will take their places?*

Commerce and Industry are calling for men of *specialized training.* The nation's business must be speeded up to meet the greatest emergency in history.

If you have *natural ability* it is your patriotic duty to *train for a bigger job.* Learn in spare time!

Thousands of Positions Vacant—$1500, $2000, $5000, $10,000 & Over

In every industry, trade and profession, important positions, with attractive salaries, await men who are fitted to fill them. *The need is urgent.* Will you heed the call?

The "American" Home Study Courses Fit You *for* Any Job You Want.

The American School offers you a wide range of Home Study courses. These courses have helped 50,000 men to **win.** Choose the course that's in line with your ambitions. Start your training **now.** Get on the "firing line" of business at the earliest possible moment.

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Here's Your Chance

There's no "age limit" in business today for the man who can fill the job. Send your name and address on Coupon and put an X before position you want—without obligation. By return mail we will tell you how, in time that you would otherwise waste, you can fit yourself to fill it. Complete prospectus of any course, together with a valuable book. Send the coupon **this very hour. The American School of Correspondence was chartered as an educational institution in 1897.**

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The American School of Correspondence is co-operating with some of the country's largest corporations in the big task of training employees in minor positions to assume greater responsibilities. Details of the plan will be furnished to interested executives upon request.

AMERICAN SCHOOL of Correspondence, Dept. G1078, Chicago, U. S. A.

Gentlemen: Without obligation please send me booklet and tell me how I can qualify for position marked X.

——Electrical Engineer.	——Business Manager.	——Lawyer.	——Automobile Engineer.
——Elec. Light & Power Supt.	——Auditor.	——Plumb. and Heat. Est.	——Automobile Repairer.
——Telephone Engineer.	——Accountant.	——Reclamation Engineer.	——High School Course.
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——Building Contractor.	——Fire Ins. Adjuster.		
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Just send your name and address for this New Elgin with our Special $5 Gold Chain Free, and our bed-rock confidential price will surprise and delight you.

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on rebuilt at the factory by the well-known "Young Process." Sold for low cash—installment or rented. Rental applies on purchase price. Write for full details and guarantee. Free trial.

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Examinations will likely be held everywhere soon

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Country residents and city residents stand the same chance for immediate appointment. Common-sense education sufficient. Political influence NOT REQUIRED.

We will prepare 25 Write immediately for schedule showing the places and **candidates FREE!** dates of all coming Gov't examinations. Don't delay. Every day you lose means the loss of just so much coaching before the rapidly approaching examinations.

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This coupon, filled out as directed, entitles the sender to (1) free specimen questions, (2) a free copy of our copyrighted book, "Government Positions and How to Get Them," (3) a list of positions now easily obtainable, and (4) to consideration for Free Coaching for the examination here checked.

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"I Got the Job!"

"I'm to be Manager of my Department starting Monday. The boss said he had been watching all the men. When he found I had been studying at home with the International Correspondence Schools he knew I had the right stuff in me—that I was bound to make good. Now we can move over to that house on Oakland Avenue and you can have a maid and take things easy. I tell you, Nell, taking that course with the I. C. S. was the best thing I ever did."

Spare-time study with the I. C. S. is winning promotions for thousands of men and bringing happiness to thousands of homes all over the world. In offices, shops, stores, mines, mills and on railroads, I. C. S. trained men are stepping up to big jobs, over the heads of older men, past those whose only qualification is long service.

There is a job ahead of *you* that some man is going to be picked for. The boss can't take chances. When he selects the one to hold it he is going to choose a trained man with sound, practical knowledge of the work. Get busy right now and put yourself in line for that promotion. You can do it in spare time in your own home through the International Correspondence Schools, just as nearly two million men have done in the last twenty-five years, just as more than 100,000 men are doing today.

The first step these men took was to mark and mail this coupon. Make *your* start the same way—and make it right now.

TEAR OUT HERE

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BOX 2135 SCRANTON, PA.

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- ☐ MINE FOREMAN OR ENGINEER
- ☐ Metallurgist or Prospector
- ☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER
- ☐ Marine Engineer
- ☐ ARCHITECT
- ☐ Contractor and Builder
- ☐ Architectural Draftsman
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- ☐ French
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Name _____

Present Occupation _____

Street and No. _____

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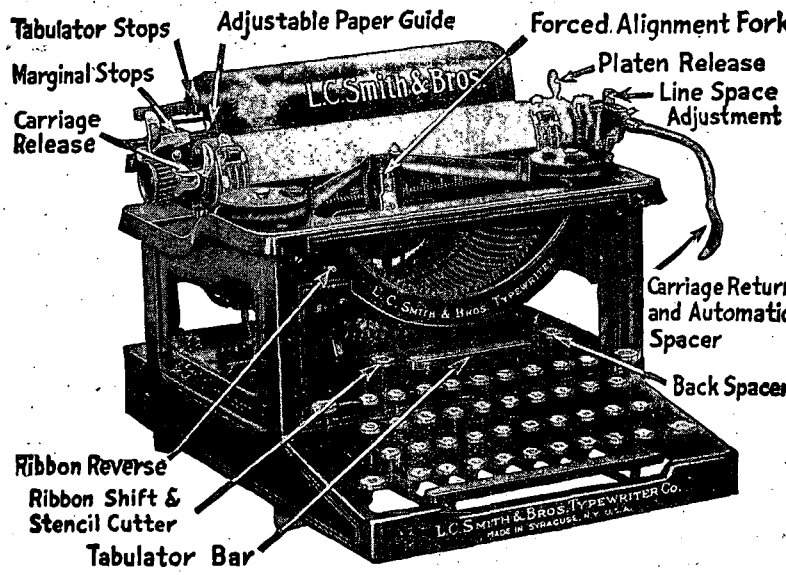

I want, through this advertisement, to establish as friendly business relations with you as I possibly can. I want you to realize also, that it is my earnest effort and intention to give you full honest value for every dollar that you spend with me. This is the only way I can succeed. My advertisement has appeared in this magazine continuously for more than four years.

I am building up my business on the foundation of good value and square dealings. I am saving thousands of satisfied customers thousands of dollars, by supplying, perfect—late style—visible writing—typewriters, at remarkably low prices.

All my transactions are handled throughout by personal correspondence. I assure you every courtesy and consideration, in your dealings with me. Your order will have my prompt, careful, personal attention. I will be glad to do business with you.

Harry A Smith

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Send me only $2.50 a month until the low total price of $48.80 is paid, and the machine is yours

This is absolutely the most generous typewriter offer ever made. Do not rent a machine when you can pay $2.50 a month and own one. Think of it—Buying a $100.00 machine for $48.80. Cash price, $45.45. Never before has anything like this been attempted.

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Perfect machines, standard size, keyboard of standard universal arrangement—universally used in teaching the touch system. The entire line of writing completely visible at all times, has the inbuilt tabulator with billing devices, the two color ribbon—with automatic reverse and key controlled shift, automatic flexible paper feed—automatic paper fingers, the back spacer—ball bearing carriage action—ball bearing shift action—ball bearing type bars—in fact, every late style feature and modern operating convenience. Comes to you with everything complete, tools, cover, operating book and instructions, ribbon, practice paper—nothing extra to buy. **You cannot imagine the perfection of this beautiful reconstructed typewriter until you have seen it.** I have sold several thousand of these perfect latest style L. C. Smith machines at this bargain price, and every one of these thousands of satisfied customers had this beautiful, strictly up-to-date machine on five days' free trial before deciding to buy it. I will send it to you F. O. B. Chicago for five days' free trial. It will sell itself, but if you are not satisfied that this is the greatest typewriter you ever saw, you can return it at my expense. You won't want to return it after you try it—**you cannot equal this wonderful value anywhere.**

H. A. SMITH
Room 311-231 N. Fifth Ave.
CHICAGO, ILL.

Ship me the L. C. Smith F. O. B. Chicago, as described in this advertisement. I will pay you the $40.00 balance of the SPECIAL $48.80 purchase price, at the rate of $2.50 per month. The title to remain in you until fully paid for. It is understood that I have five days in which to examine and try the typewriter. If I choose not to keep it I will carefully repack it and return it to the express agent. It is understood that you give the standard guarantee for one year.

Name .....

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You Take No Risk—Put In Your Order *Now*

When the typewriter arrives deposit with the express agent $8.80 and take the machine for five days' trial. If you are convinced that it is the best typewriter you ever saw, keep it and send me $2.50 a month until my bargain price of $48.80 is paid. If you don't want it, return it to the express agent, receive your $8.80 and return the machine to me. I will pay the return express charges. **This machine is guaranteed just as if you paid $100.00 for it.** It is standard. Over one hundred thousand people own and use these typewriters and think them the best ever manufactured.

The supply at this price is very limited, the price will probably be raised when my next advertisement appears, so don't delay. Fill in the coupon today—mail to me—the typewriter will be shipped promptly. There is no red tape. I employ no solicitors—no collectors—no chattel mortgage. It is simply understood that I retain title to the machine until the full $48.80 is paid. **You cannot lose. It is the greatest typewriter opportunity you will ever have. Do not send me one cent. Get the coupon in the mails today—sure.**

Harry A. Smith 311-231 N. Fifth Ave. Chicago

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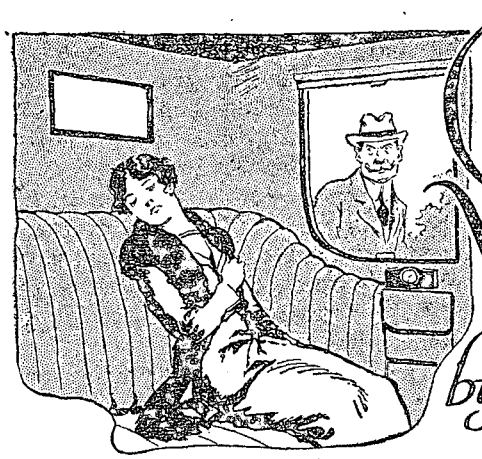
THE ARGOSY

Vol. LXXXVIII SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 1917 No. 1



Genius of Victory

by George Foxhall

Author of "McPhee's Sensational Rest," "Why There Was a Murder on Pearl Street," etc.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

THE PASSING STRANGER.

A VERMIFORM appendix isn't a nice thing to begin a story with, but there is no escaping the fact that a vermiform appendix plays such an important part in this story that it will have to receive distinguished mention sooner or later, so we may as well confront it at once. It belonged to Marian Nicholson, and she had had it, without being aware of its existence—except by supposition—for twenty-four years.

Then suddenly, after twenty-four years of humble self-effacement, it began to assert itself. When a vermiform appendix begins to assert itself it can be relied upon to attract attention.

Marian was wilful. There can be no disputing that. Besides, she was very beautiful and very rich. Young ladies so equipped are allowed to be wilful. It is the only spice for an otherwise dull life. Yet no young lady, however beautiful and rich, could be half as imperious as her own vermiform appendix.

Marian should have stayed overnight with Etta Bascombe, in the first place. Everybody was expecting her to do so, and, as far as could be discovered, that was the only reason for her refusal.

"I've been here three days already," she asserted, "and I told father I should only stay a day or two."

"But why hurry away at a moment's notice, dear?" Etta remonstrated. "You said you might stay a week."

"That was purely facetious, Etta. You have no sense of humor."

"And Albert's coming in the morning."

"Is he really? You almost tempt me to stay. Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

Etta threw up her hands in despair.

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"Hear the unreasonable little minx," she begged of her husband. "She coolly announces an intention of going away just as she is about to start, and reproaches *me* for not giving her due notice that my brother-in-law is coming, when he didn't know until ten minutes ago that he could come. Then he telephoned. I should think that an arrangement so hurriedly made could be hurriedly canceled."

"Poor Albert! Why not let him come? The rest and sea air will do him good."

"I mean *your* hurried arrangement. Besides, a naval officer could hardly be suffering from lack of sea air."

"Nor rest!" laughed Marian. "I'm awfully sorry, dear, believe me. It was only when I heard you saying just now that this was Wednesday, when I was thinking all the time that it was Tuesday, that I realized how thoughtless I'd been of poor father. I told him I'd be home surely by Wednesday."

"But you can telephone him, Marian."

Marian looked at her friend with a very dutiful air of gentle reproach.

"But that wouldn't be a bit kind. Besides, I really don't feel as well as usual, and I'd like to get home."

"If you're ill you most certainly should be here. There's nobody there but servants and a man."

"A sick woman's place is at home."

"I think you are treating us very unkindly, Marian."

"Don't say that, dear, or you'll make me stay. And you know I'm always unendurable when I spoil a whim. Albert would find me appalling."

"He's more likely to be appalled by your absence."

"That's better than being appalled by my presence. You see, I haven't positively refused Albert yet, and I can't take any chances on disenchanting him."

"It's a mad hour to start on a forty-five-mile automobile trip alone. Mark, I think you had better go with her."

"No such thing! How absurd!" Marian interposed. "I shall not be alone. Tim will be with me, and he's twice as strong as Mark. The idea of a girl, sitting at her ease in her car, with her chauffeur driving, needing an escort in what is all practically the metropolitan area!"

"But I'm anxious about you, dear. Suppose you are taken ill on the way?"

"I should drop Mark by the roadside and let him walk home. I'm perfectly vicious when I'm ill."

"I suppose you'll have your own way."

"Let me, dear. And please hurry, Mark."

"I'm still in favor of abduction," grumbled Mark, on his way to give the necessary orders. "I think you're simply teasing Bert. Beware, woman! There is such a thing as a Nemesis."

So, in spite of their pleas, reproaches, and warnings, Marian set out. She sat for a while watching the broad back of Tim, the chauffeur, seem to grow broader in the approaching dusk. Then she dropped the window-frame between them and sat where she could speak to him without shouting.

"Tim," she said, "I want to ask you a hypothetical question."

Tim, who had driven Marian in a pony-cart long before he had driven her in an automobile, turned and smiled.

"I'll make out to answer it to your pleasure, miss," said he, "if not to your profit."

"If you were a girl, and were staying with some friends, and expected to stay a day or two longer, and you suddenly felt sure that you were going to be quite ill, and you overheard a telephone conversation proving that a man who had proposed to you six times was coming up next morning, and you were quite sure that he was simply coming to propose for the seventh time, and you realized more forcibly than ever that you were going to be ill, and your house was only forty-five miles away, and your father might *possibly* be expecting you, and you had an excellent automobile and the best chauffeur in the world, what would you do?"

"Sure, 'tis a case for grave consideration, miss," replied Tim. "If I was a very sweet an' dainty lady, I'm thinking I should just act within me judgment, knowing it was bound to be right."

"And if you were not absolutely positive that your father would be actually

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expecting you, though he might be, do you think it would be wicked to use that as an excuse for leaving suddenly, if you knew they would simply insist on your staying if they knew how ill you really were? Do you think it would be wicked?"

"Sure, if I were a sweet an' dainty lady, and I had a fine an' noble father, I'd know for sure that if he was not expecting me, he'd be hoping for me."

"But it might be wicked to say *expecting*."

"'Twould be easy of forgiveness, miss. 'Tis such bits of wickedness we are entitled to, so long as we're sorry we have to do them in necessity."

"I knew you could straighten it out for me, Tim. Next to my father, you're the wisest man in the world."

"An' the best chauffeur, miss," grinned Tim. "Sure I think you tried to bribe me wisdom with your blarney, miss; but meself is incorruptible."

"I've had a nasty pain in my side all day, Tim, and now it's getting worse. Do you think it might be appendicitis?"

"Mother of angels! I hope not, miss. You should never have started out if that's what you felt like."

Marian groaned and crawled back to the broader seat.

"You can't welsh on your wisdom now!" she gasped. "Drive fast!"

Tim did drive fast. Harrison, Mamaroneck, and Larchmont melted like passing thoughts. At New Rochelle, where the Post Road turns in closer to the open Sound, they made slower progress until they had crossed the gloomy strip between Pelham and Pelham Parkway. Then the great car coiled the shining boulevard beneath it with a greedy hum. The jolting crossing at White Plains Road brought a groan of agony from Marian.

"Make for the town house, Tim!" she cried. "I shall have to stop off there, telephone father, and get a doctor."

"Yes, miss! 'Tis me should be assassinated for not taking you back when I knew you were sick."

They passed through Bronx Park and climbed up to the Grand Concourse for another arrow-flight. Then more agonizing bumps, and the broad, smooth thoroughfare of Seventh Avenue to the park and, a few minutes later, the avenue.

Marian was almost dazed with the intensity of pain, but she pulled herself together as the car came to a halt.

"Stay there, miss," said Tim, "until I get the door open; then I'll come an' carry you in."

She settled back with a moan half of pain and half of thankfulness. But a minute later the thankfulness was quite dispelled. Tim returned.

"There's nobody home, miss," he said helplessly. "Sure what am I going to do with you? I'll take you to a hospital. They weren't expecting anybody, so I s'pose they went to a picture show, the lazy 'madhauns."

"Is there no way to [illegible]

"Not a way [illegible] front door is boarded [illegible] basement windows and doors are iron-barred."

"Then go around the corner to McCarthy's drug-store and telephone Dr. Lewis. If he's not in, try Dr. Roberts, and then Dr. Wild. There's no use in my riding around until we find out if one of them is at home. Hurry, Tim! I'm awfully ill."

Tim took the corner at a furious run. It seemed as if the demons of pain took fresh courage as soon as Marian was alone, or as if that section of her attention which had had Tim to focus upon now gave itself up entirely to the realization of pain. She groaned aloud and began to cry a little.

A shadow darkened the open window.

"Are you ill, ma'am?" asked a man's voice. "Can I do anything for you?"

Now this happened to be one of Marian's pet irritations: that anybody should ask her two questions at one time involving contradictory answers.

"Yes, no! Go away!" she groaned.

"Pardon me. You are suffering, and seem to be alone. Let me help you. Can I ring your door-bell, or help you up the steps?"

"No, thank you. Forgive me for being rude. I am really being cared for. I think I'm going to have appendicitis. I was taken ill on the way to our country home,

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so I called at our town house, but find the caretaker is out. My man has gone to telephone for a doctor. I'm afraid—I'm—going—to—faint."

Which was precisely what Marian did at once. The man glanced swiftly up the street. Then, without an instant's hesitation, he sprang into the driver's seat, swung the car around, and sped down the side street.

CHAPTER II.

HATCHING THE PLOT.

FREDERICK SLATTERLY was a gentleman of very ancient lineage. He was descended from Adam. Finding this not sufficiently remote, and perhaps lacking in distinction, Frederick had recently begun to put the blame for his existence upon certain—or uncertain—Irish kings; who were, at all events, too dead to deny it.

"A landless Irish gentleman, me boy!" he would say with a melancholy flirt of the hand as he developed the acquaintance of a new member of some club he managed somehow either to belong to or intrude upon. "A landless Irish gentleman! Me ancestors were kings, but all me own father left me was his good name and his Irish pride."

And in the up-to-date humor of clubland, Frederick was already becoming known as the Crown Prince — because it seemed highly probable that he would never come into his inheritance.

Frederick lived upon the outskirts of society, those broad regions that hold at once the most charming and the most sordid of society's personalities.

Some of these fluctuating lights may possibly be descendants of Irish kings, but certainly Frederick was not. The good name he inherited was Schlatter, while all the Irish pride obtained from his father was whatever might reasonably be expected to descend from a Bavarian brewer not yet defunct.

From this same brewer Frederick also received, on condition that he kept away from him, the rather slender pittance that gave him leisure to skirt surreptitiously along the very outer borders of society, where occasionally he picked up a bone or a feather, or sometimes even a whole lamb or goose. The remittances from the brewer had been irregular and fluctuating during the war-swept days, and Frederick had been obliged to whistle the wind up by expedients that often held more thrills than profit.

The sight of a richly dressed young woman, alone and helpless in a luxuriously appointed car, therefore, awoke in his questing mind a hint of possibilities. When the young woman admitted her connection with a house Mr. Schlatter had identified as belonging to Eric Nicholson, the hint became an inspiration for the carrying out of which Marian's swoon appeared to be providential.

At Madison Avenue, Schlatter turned south and then west. Here he stopped the car in the middle of a block, sprang down, and opened the door.

Marian was vaguely conscious.

"Is this a doctor's, Tim?" she asked.

"Yes, Miss Nicholson. I am Dr. Schlatter," said that versatile gentleman soothingly. "Let me help you into the house, and we'll see if we can't make you comfortable."

Marian put her arms over his shoulders, and he helped her to the sidewalk. Then without more ado he picked her up and carried her up the steps. The door of the house was opened as he reached it.

"Send Dr. Klein here instantly," Schlatter ordered the man who had opened the door. "Dr. Klein is a woman doctor, Miss Nicholson. Try to recline easily on this couch. The doctor will be here in a moment. In fact, I'll go myself and hurry her."

Dr. Schlatter did go himself; and if he did not actually hasten the arrival of "Dr." Klein, he hastened the attainment of her doctor's degree, which, curiously enough, she had been unaware of before. She did happen to have studied nursing, however, before entering upon her present career.

Schlatter met her coming down-stairs and silently signaled her back to the library, which she had just left.

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"What's this doctor nonsense, Fritz?" she demanded.

Schlatter spoke rapidly.

"Listen, Bertha. This is the best chance to grab real money I've had for years, and we will divide it evenly. I found Eric Nicholson's daughter in her automobile outside their town house. She was on the way to Nicholson Cove when she was taken very ill. I think appendicitis is incipient. She made for the town house and found the caretaker had gone out. Then she sent the chauffeur to telephone for a doctor. That's when I found her. You know what she needs; ice applications and thin foods for a few days. There'll be a hundred thousand dollars in it."

"And you're counting on keeping her *here?*"

"For a few days. Don't you see, we're both protected by this good Samaritan thing if I've been traced here. If not, they can't find her in a hundred years. All right? Make it fast."

"Don't be slangy, Fritz."

The calm and capable features of Bertha Klein had shown no surprise or other emotion during this disclosure. She appeared to weigh the advantages and disadvantages for a moment.

"How are you going to get rid of the car?" she asked.

"Thought it all out! Chauffeur won't know but what the house servant or some man friend has come along and taken Miss Nicholson to some doctor or hospital. He won't dream of abduction. Probably be an hour before he gives the alarm to the police, if then. Send Kurt down to Bowling Green with the car. Tell him to leave it there and come up-town on the subway."

Another moment of thought, then: "All right! Say you telephoned her father, and she's to stay here, and that he'll come here as quickly as possible. Then I'll get her to bed. Are you a doctor, too? All right!"

Bertha went to a desk, from which she took a physician's thermometer and some bottles. Then she pushed a bell-button and preceded Schlatter down the stairs. At the foot they met a maid, to whom Bertha whispered some hurried instructions, while Schlatter preceded her to the room where Marian lay.

She sat up weakly as he entered.

"Ask Tim to telephone to my father," she began.

"I have already telephoned him, Miss Nicholson," Schlatter interrupted. "Mr. Nicholson knows Dr. Klein well by repute, and he has instructed her to do everything possible for your comfort. He is on his way over here now, and the doctor is having a room prepared for you."

"You are very kind," murmured Marian. "I'm afraid I'm going to be a lot of trouble. I feel dreadfully ill."

Dr. Klein, with her most perfect sick-room manner, entered, serene and reassuring.

"Well, well!" she began softly. "Is this the little sick lady? What is it, dear? Something very sudden? Your side? All about there, eh? Poor child, I know just how you feel. Quite a wicked temperature, but not too alarming, my dear. Right there, eh? Hum! Never mind, we'll have you feeling better in no time at all."

The maid entered with a glass of water. Bertha shook two pellets from a bottle into her hand.

"First of all swallow these, dear," she ordered. "They'll numb that dreadful pain a little. Then Nada and I will put you to bed, and if papa hurries he'll just manage to see you before you drop off to sleep."

Papa would indeed have had to hurry. Vaguely conscious of something wrong, poor Marian fought pitifully to ward off the effects of the insidious drug she had swallowed. The strong hand of Bertha Klein was pressing her gently back upon the couch, and her firm, calm voice sounded with a far-off, hypnotic cadence in her ears, and everything receded as if borne away by a rushing wind, and Marian slept.

Schlatter was standing by the window, looking out around the edge of the blind into the street.

"Has Kurt gone with the car?" asked Bertha. "We don't want it standing there very long."

"He's gone," Schlatter reported. "Is it appendicitis, do you think?"

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"Only threatening, I'm pretty sure, but Dr. Brunner will be here in ten minutes and he'll know. We're not going to take any chances on the girl's life. She's too valuable and she certainly is a beauty.

"Nada, carry her into the bedroom. Here's Louise; she'll help you. Have you got all the things ready, Louise?"

"*Ja, mein Fräulein,*" answered Louise.

"Simply undress her and put her to bed, and you stay with her, Nada, until Dr. Brunner arrives."

"We won't approach her father until she's recovered," announced Schlatter. "How much do you think I should demand?"

"How much? How much what?"

"Money, of course!"

"None of course! Do you think we are common kidnapers, *mein Herr?*"

"Certainly! That's what I intend to be."

"Ah! You have been saved from a petty crime, my friend, and have been enabled, blindly perhaps, but surely, to perform a great service for the Fatherland."

Schlatter turned first very red and then quite pale.

"What has Marian Nicholson to do with the Fatherland?" he asked.

"Dr. Brunner will decide that, *mein* Fritz. Perhaps nothing! In that case the Fräulein Nicholson will be returned to her poor father. Perhaps much! In which case—"

"By God, Bertha! This is too much!" The "Crown Prince" sprang in front of the placid *Fräulein,* his face bloated purple with rage. "If you couldn't agree to this proposition you'd no business pretending to agree for the purpose of spoiling it. This means an easy life for me, and—"

"And to oppose the Fatherland means a far from easy death," purred Bertha, placid as ever, yet indescribably threatening. "Remember that I am your superior, Herr Schlatter, and that I have only to utter one little word and you disappear more completely than the poor *Fräulein* has disappeared. Come, Fritz, make a virtue of necessity. It would grieve me to order you killed. It would grieve me even more to have Dr. Brunner order you killed. If there is anything in this plan as I see it I am willing to let you win great honor. Perhaps you will get the Iron Cross. Perhaps even a money grant! Yes, surely a money grant! You shall have all the credit."

Schlatter sank weakly into a chair.

"I don't know what you mean, Bertha. Explain it to me, please," he said.

"You are blind. You know who this man Eric Nicholson is, don't you? He is the great magician of America. Of the world! He is America's greatest inventor, and he has for six months been president of the Unification Board, supervising and coordinating the country's military, naval, inventive, and economic resources. There are some things we cannot find out; that no investigating service in the world could find out. But he knows. His daughter will be the price of that information, and she is the light of his soul.

"And you, my friend, because I love you next to the Fatherland, shall claim to have seen all this, and that upon the inspiration of it you captured and brought here the girl who is the soul of America. It shall be so reported and your reward will be great. Now do you understand?"

"But suppose Nicholson refuses to give up the information; relying upon the police and the secret service for the discovery of his daughter; or putting his country first? Our plot will peter out and I suppose I shall be at liberty to get what I can out of him?"

"If war is declared, and Mr. Nicholson refuses to meet our terms, the inevitable will happen, if our chiefs see this as I see it. The Fatherland will not threaten unless it intends to make good its threat. The name of Germany stands for no weakness of purpose."

"You cannot mean that she will really be killed."

"She will be killed and found dead, so that all may read the lesson."

"My God! You divide your time between heaven and hell, woman."

"The personal has nothing to do with the national. I would give my own life as readily; or yours."

"Thanks! I hope you'll restrict your generosity for a little while at all events. Here comes the estimable Dr. Brunner, who

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is held up for us to behold as your chief. I think he watches the drooping of your eyelid, however."

Bertha gave him a sharp glance.

"What you see and don't speak of, nobody will know that you have seen," she snapped. "To speak of all you see, or think you see, is dangerous folly."

"I should be careful not to speak of such things to anybody but you, *mein Fräulein,*" he laughed.

Her calm eyes covered him serenely.

"That is most dangerous of all," she said. "The Herr Dokter went straight up to the library I suppose. I must go and tell him of our patient. In future be very careful, Herr Schlatter."

Schlatter watched the beautiful woman go. Then he wiped the perspiration from his forehead with a nervous hand.

"I think I'm sitting on the lid of hell," he muttered, "and she's half curious to see the devil break loose — unless she's the devil herself."

The door opened a little. Bertha looked back into the room.

"You had better come with me and tell the doctor of your discovery yourself, Fritz," she said. "And make no mistake about the doctor, please. He is the chief man we have in America; and very thorough."

CHAPTER III.

ONLY ONE WORD.

IN the great library at Nicholson Cove fifteen men gathered around the massive table, at the head of which sat Eric Nicholson.

The president of the Unification Board was a man on the sunny side of sixty, of something less than medium size, with a face of such calm strength that the dreaming eyes seemed not to dream so much as to be conscious with vision; as if they saw constantly the things the mighty brain behind them would presently show to the world as concrete facts.

"Gentlemen," he was saying, "The period of our existence as a body is about to end. Very soon now the finger of Fate may write Fate's most dreadful word. We have done our best to see that, dreadful though it may be, it shall not be direful. The country knows nothing of our activities, scarcely of our existence, and those who may to-morrow be our enemies know almost as little, in spite of their spies. Those of you who are high in command in the nation's forces will feel the value of our labors every day.

"Within six months we have effected organizations and made preparations that are undreamed of. Great flotillas of our aeroplanes of unexampled offensive power, have circled over cities whose inhabitants have been holding forth with angry scorn about our 'nonexistent airfleet.' Our coasts have been equipped with defenses that will startle the world.

"We have worked wonders. Perhaps we shall find that we should have worked miracles. We have given up, gladly, our time and our money. Perhaps we shall find, after the fateful plunge, if the plunge be made, that our country will require of us still dearer things — our own lives or lives that are much more precious to us than our own.

"Such records of our labors as have dealt exclusively with one or another of the already created departments of government, which labors we have performed in cooperation with such departments, we have already handed over to heads of those departments. Those which have involved new fields of research, organization, and expenditure, will in a few days be handed over to the President or such new Cabinet officers as the Congress at his recommendation shall create.

"Our work as a body is completed. Our work as individuals will become neither less arduous nor less patriotic. God has matched us with mighty events. As we have shrunk from no labor, we, if the need shall come, in common with our fellow-citizens, shall shrink from no sacrifice. We are citizens of no mean country. For the moment we rest, and wait."

It was all spoken very quietly. There was a decorous tapping of knuckles on the table in half shy applause.

For a minute everybody sat in silence,

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not of awkwardness but as if each man must for a moment be alone with the solemnity of his own thoughts. Then Admiral Gleason arose and moved that the Board adjourn until summoned to Washington by the President, and a moment later there dissolved, as a working body, the least known and perhaps the most effective organization the United States had ever produced.

In the form in which it was created, its work was done.

Eric Nicholson, the magician, at whose command the genii of inventive science harnessed the forces of nature to obey the will of mankind, the mightiest searching brain of a mighty civilization, sat hunched forward in a deep chair, gazing into the cold and empty fireplace of his library.

A knock sounded on the door.

"Commander Hadley wishes to see you very urgently, sir," a footman announced.

"Noyes said you were not to be disturbed, sir," came the voice of the commander, who had not waited for permission to enter, "but I took a great liberty because of the urgency."

"Sit down, Bert, my boy. You know you are always welcome. What is so urgent?"

"Marian left my sister's house at eight o'clock, sir. I was to go there on two days leave to-morrow morning. My sister, knowing that I was going only to see Marian, telephoned me that she had left for home and that they were a little worried about her because she complained of not feeling well. I got my leave advanced and decided to run over here to see if she was all right. She had not arrived.

"I telephoned to the town-house to see if she had stopped there for the night. Tim Bryan, her chauffeur was there, almost insane. He said they had driven to the town-house because Marian had been attacked by a severe pain which she thought was appendicitis. The caretakers were out and Marian had sent Tim to a drug-store to telephone to a doctor. When he returned the car had vanished.

"He supposed that perhaps I or some other friend had discovered her and driven her to a doctor. The caretaker and his wife returned about then, so Tim went into the house and waited for a message. When an hour had gone by without one he became uneasy and telephoned the police. When I rang up they had just reported the discovery of the car, empty, at Bowling Green. That's all we know, sir."

Mr. Nicholson was on his feet. His face had the appearance of having been carved in marble. He seized a telephone, but before he could lift the receiver he was forestalled by a ring.

"Is this Herr Eric Nicholson?" asked a voice with a noticeable German accent.

"Yes! What is it. Be quick, please."

"Your daughter is in good care. I am a great doctor. Your daughter was on the verge of an attack of appendicitis. She will recover in about a week without an operation if she has good care."

"Where is she, man? Where is she?" shouted Mr. Nicholson, at the same time handing Albert an auxiliary receiver.

"In good hands. In German hands. I am a great doctor. All the great doctors are Germans. A code for wireless will be sent you. Through your private wireless you will give us by this code certain information about the new system of coast defense and you will inform us on what day and at what hour a submarine can put into your cove to secure certain maps and plans and other information that will be required of you.

"The code and the list of requirements will reach you by to-morrow morning's mail. When the information has been tested, and found accurate, your daughter will be restored to you. Otherwise, she will either be killed or allowed to die. We shall expect to hear from you by to-morrow night.

"If war is declared by your country before we get this information we shall give you only twelve hours to supply it. That—"

"Listen! Please listen, my dear friend. She is so young. Tell me where she is. I'll give you millions of dollars. She is my only child. Her — her mother — God, man! Give her back to me!"

The old man's voice was broken and humble with heartbreaking appeal.

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"You know the way," came the unmoved response.

"Then listen to me. If a hair of her head is injured I'll make your German people look to hell for comfort. If she isn't with me within twenty-four hours, safe and comfortable, I'll turn over to the authorities a weapon that will leave you a race of maniacs. By God, I'll leave no memory of you but a horror. Remember!"

The great scientist banged the receiver onto the hook, and the two men, father and lover, searched each other's eyes for a feverish second as if for a sign of hope.

But they knew their enemy. Blind in his monopoly of ruthlessness his vast conceit led him to believe that others were not equally ruthless because they lacked power or courage.

"They'll carry out their threat to the letter," groaned Hadley, his bronzed face bloodless and his hands trembling. "And all your vengeance won't bring her back to life."

The older man still said nothing. He stood perfectly still, his eyes peering as if he were looking without shrinking into the hell of desolation he would work. Then he turned abruptly to the commander.

"There is no problem this side of death that cannot be solved by thought," he said. "Remember that. Panic and aimless thinking spell disaster. First, we must try to delay for a few hours the severing of diplomatic relations as contemplated. That will be my part. I shall start for New York and Washington within five minutes. Your work will be, first, to keep the police and the servants from giving out any news that would lead to race-rioting and clamor that might bring war within twenty-four hours. Your next task will be to find Marian.

"In New York there are no less than six German doctors who are suspected of being spies. Any one of them might have done it. I'll tell you all I know about them as we ride. I'll give you a card to Mearson, the New York head of the secret service, and I'll join you as soon as possible. Make the house your headquarters. God! What a mistake. I have been guarded day and night and have left my chief treasure unprotected. These demons have added another new horror to warfare."

"Shall we try to trace the telephone message?"

"Useless! They are not so simple. There's reported to be a woman at the head of them. We've never been able to trace her or find out who she is. She is known simply as *Fräulein*. Judging by what she is credited with she's merciless. We must find the *Fräulein*."

Noyes appeared with Mr. Nicholson's hat and gloves, having received a prearranged signal through the bell. The magician's car, with valises ready packed for travel and two motorcycle men to follow, was waiting.

The scientist waved the man away and turned to Hadley. He seized the young man's hands, and tears rolled down his cheeks.

"My boy," he said. "I'm afraid! I'm horribly afraid. They've spared neither child nor woman. She's all I have. You are young, and hope and optimism are easier to you. Give me a little of it. You don't think they'll kill her? Say some word that will give me something to stand on. I'm old and the world is empty."

The big sailor groaned in agony of spirit. In his hard face was no hope; only incredible bitterness.

"And I'm young and the world's empty, sir," said he. "We know them. By God, I can think of only one word, and you know well enough what that is."

"Revenge?"

"Revenge!"

The old man shook his head sadly.

"A word for devils, my boy," he said. "It has no room in our sane faith, in which the future is eternal. Ruthlessness punishes the innocent with the guilty. America may not make war that way. The clean traditions of our country belong to the past and the present and the future. If we cannot save Marian, we must hold our hands at justice. I want that devil's payment, revenge, and so do you, but I—can get it. My power is greater than I can bear. Please God to spare me from temptation by saving her."

And neither of them mentioned, or even

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thought of, the one sure way to save her; the way of treason and infamy.

CHAPTER IV.

"SOMETHING QUEER ABOUT THIS."

MARIAN was brought to consciousness by the impinging of a counter-shock upon the pain that was droning feverishly through the subconscious wanderings of her artificial sleep. The girl Nada was bending over her, her hand beneath the bedclothes adjusting an ice-bag.

"Who are you?" Marian asked, not yet recalling the hazy events that had been chiefly a background to her pain. "A nurse?"

"*Ja, mein Fräulein?*" answered Nada, her plump and pretty face lighting up with a gentle smile.

Marian looked about her. The room was a delight of elegance and taste and daintiness, but it was not her own. She remembered now that Tim had driven her to a doctor's, and that there had been a woman physician who had talked of putting her to bed.

"Has my father come yet?" she asked.

"*Nein, mein Fräulein.*"

"Where is this place?"

"*Ja, mein Fräulein.*"

Marian considered this a moment.

"One of us is delirious," she concluded. "I rather suspect I'm the one."

She cogitated over her next essay. "Where is the doctor?"

"*Der Herr Dokter iss—*"

"*Nein! Der Fräulein Dokter!* How well I speak German!"

"*Der Fräulein Dokter? Ah! Ja, Ja!*"

"An impasse! Is that all the English you know?"

"*Nein, mein Fräulein.*"

"It serves me right," muttered Marian. "I always cribbed my German, and I don't remember anything I cribbed. This is desperate. I've got to find out where I am, in some way. Fetch the doctor! Doctor! I think you spell it with a k, but that can't make much difference."

She pointed to the door and repeated, "Doctor!"

As if in magical answer, the door opened and Dr. Klein entered, followed by a man.

He was a small, round man with poppy eyes that looked out snappily through round, rimmed glasses. He had a bristling little mustache that turned its little ends up fiercely toward his eyes as if for inspection, and he walked with a fussy, swaggering little strut that would have seemed ridiculous but for the masterful personality that seemed to be coiled behind his absurd mannerisms.

"Ah!" said Bertha. "Awake, I see, and feeling better, I'm sure. This is Dr. Brunner, dear. The doctor has already seen you, but you haven't seen him before."

Marian let her weak hand rest for a second in the doctor's chubby palm while she eyed him without pleasure.

"I seem to have fallen into a regular den of doctors here," she commented not very graciously. "I'm sure I'm not so seriously ill as to need three." She turned her eyes on Bertha. "I thought you were taking care of me."

"We are not such a formidable array as we seem, Miss Nicholson," laughed Bertha. "The real doctor happened to be out, so, to reassure you in your frightened condition, I allowed my nurse's degree to be promoted a little, while the young man whose presence of mind brought you here is, I believe, a doctor of music. Dr. Brunner you have heard of, of course. He is one of the greatest surgeons in the world."

"And entirely at your service, dear lady," interposed the doctor, taking Marian's wrist. "Has the pain disappeared?"

"Almost! It's beginning to feel quite numb there, at least. Hasn't my father arrived yet?"

"He was here while you slept, but left word that he was obeying a peremptory call to Washington. He will send your friends and your maid in the morning. I could not allow you to be disturbed tonight."

"What's the matter with me? Appendicitis?"

"Not fully developed, but a very close shave. You will be all right, though not very strong, in less than a week."

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"Then I don't need a world-famous surgeon to take care of me. I would like to see my own physician, Dr. Lewis, in the morning."

"Certainly, my dear young lady—in the morning. I'm sure I shall have his distinguished indorsement."

"You'd better have, if it comes to that. He brought me into the world, and I guess he can keep me in it just as well as any doctor with a German accent."

The world-famous surgeon flushed, and his eyes threatened to pop entirely out.

"My dear child," he snapped, "I have no accent! I speak English absolutely without accent."

"Then it must be a brogue," Marian retorted calmly. "At any rate, I don't like you, and I won't have Dr. Lewis sneered at in any dialect or accent under the sun. You are dismissed. If this is your house, my father will buy it, if necessary. I'm too comfortable to be moved just now. Good night."

"You are an—" the doctor was beginning fiercely, when he encountered the calm, gray eyes of Bertha Klein fixed upon him. Instantly his manner changed.

"You are as wilful as you are beautiful, *Fräulein*," he said, smiling. "And I must say it is equally attractive in you. You American young ladies confuse me. If I seemed to sneer at your good doctor, I apologize unreservedly. I know him well and admire him."

"Thank you! You are quite forgiven, and you may take care of me until Dr. Lewis arrives, and afterward if he wishes. I suppose there'll be some red tape about professional ethics that I don't understand. Whatever Dr. Lewis decides will be all right."

"We shall both want to decide whatever you wish, dear lady. And now, after the nurse has replenished the ice-bag, you must try to sleep. Good night, Miss Nicholson."

"Good night, doctor. And what name am I to call you by, fair-lady-who-put-me-to-bed? I suppose I ought not to call you doctor, but you look much too something or other to be called nurse. I've forgotten your last name."

"The name I like best is Bertha, when it is pronounced as we pronounce it, Bert'a. Don't you think it's prettier than the English way?"

"Indeed, yes. May I call you that? Let me see if I can say it, Bert'a. It doesn't sound quite as pretty as when you say it, but—"

"Much prettier! Say it again."

"Bert'a! I shall improve. You have been very lovely to me, Bert'a, and I have been very insolent and ungracious and ungrateful."

"You have been very much alarmed dear. You have behaved wonderfully."

"What is the name of my nurse?"

"Nada. She will sleep on the couch beside you."

"I am quite surrounded by pretty names. She doesn't speak English."

"But you speak German, of course?"

"*Nein, mein Fräulein. Ja, mein Herr.* That is my entire vocabulary."

"I'm so sorry. To-morrow you shall have a nurse who speaks English."

"No, thank you! I like Nada. Her smile is perfection. Is this a hospital?"

"It is my house. I like to have a patient here when I can. It is like old times, before I was 'much too something or other.' If I stay here and talk to you, Dr. Brunner will say I have forgotten all I ever learned. Good night, dear."

"Good night, Bert'a. Nada can't keep me awake by talking to me, anyway."

"I think you'd make her talk to you if she could speak English," laughed Bertha, peeping back through the half-closed door. "Good night."

After the door closed, Marian lay looking at it in silent and puzzled meditation for a minute. Then she backoned Nada to come near, and signed for her to bend over her.

"Why do you pretend that you don't understand English?" she whispered.

The color surged over Nada's soft neck and dyed her ears a bright vermilion. She turned two starry eyes upon Marian, who patted her cheek reassuringly.

"How did you discover it?" asked Nada. "I resisted every test they could think of."

"They didn't try your sense of humor.

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I saw your eyes laugh when I said the doctor spoke with a German accent. You knew he was going to be very angry before he uttered a sound. I saw you steal a sly glance at him. They don't know that you speak English?"

"No! I knew that ignorance of English was one of the requirements for the position, and I needed the position."

"There's a lot of meat in that answer, too, Nada. There's a mighty queer atmosphere about this place altogether, and do you know what I'm going to do?"

"What?"

"Sleep! That's what I always do when anything puzzles me, and I need my wits brightened up. I inherit the ability to do it from father. You've heard of my father, haven't you, Nada?"

"Who is he?"

"Eric Nicholson. He's the greatest man who ever lived. You saw him here to-night, didn't you?"

"I—I think the doctor said so."

"I'm sure the doctor *said* so. I think I'm going to need a *lot* of sleep. Get undressed and lie here beside me, Nada. I'm very lonely, and I don't want to think about it. I want to sleep. Lock the door, Nada. First open it—suddenly."

Nada went softly to the door, softly turned the knob, and gave a sudden pull. The door remained unmoved.

"It's fastened from the other side," whispered Nada.

"I told you there was something queer about this, and I don't think you're a party to it, Nada. There's something I'm too ill to understand, but my father will make somebody squirm for it. My father can do everything."

CHAPTER V.

"YOU MUST NOT FAIL ME."

BERTHA sat for a long time at her desk in the library, lost in thought. Brunner sat quite still in a chair that almost engulfed him, stealing occasional glances at her. Then he got up and paced the room a couple of times.

Quite evidently he was becoming nervous. At last he could stand the silence no longer.

"I'm afraid I almost lost my temper, *Fräulein*," he said.

"Is your vanity about your accent more important than the welfare of the Fatherland?" she asked, looking at him swiftly. "At present you are a doctor, charged with caring for somebody whose life is important to the empire."

"I am very sorry, *Fräulein*."

"A fool's remedy! The girl's own insouciance prevented harm. She certainly seemed to have a decided advantage. The insolent freedom given to their young girls by these Americans gives them the imperturbability of ten generations of rulers. You were quite defeated, *mein Herr*—fortunately for you."

"*Fräulein*, I am a great man. I will not be threatened."

"You are right, *mein Herr*. You will not be threatened—again. The girl, you say, is in no danger?"

"None whatever! A few hours without attention and her condition would have been serious, but she will be all right in a few days."

"Then I shall care for her myself. There is more serious work for you to do. I am expecting a communication for the ambassador, which cannot be sent by ordinary channels. It is from Herr Zimmerman, and emanates from the highest authority, at my suggestion. I have received word to-day, by cipher through the press despatches, that the U57, bearing that communication, has signaled her arrival at the point you know, where you have met her before. You will go there immediately and return as soon as possible with the message.

"You will understand the importance of this when I tell you that only three people know the nature of the communication: Herr Zimmerman, myself, and his majesty. There are no particular difficulties in the way. That is why this method was chosen. You may have to wait around a day or two for a favorable opportunity, though it isn't likely.

"Nothing is suspected so far. It will be your duty to see that nothing attracts sus-

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picion. I am not threatening you, Herr Dokter, when I say that death will be the punishment of failure in this matter—for you, and for me."

"*Fräulein!* You, who command ministers and chancellors! The genius of the empire! The *Fräulein!* Who would dare?"

"You will start on your journey at once. Somewhere *en route* you will telephone to Eric Nicholson as we arranged, using a sound-proof booth. From some other point you will mail the demands we make. From still another point you will report the conversation to me. After that I shall expect no report from you until you return with the documents you are going for. Speed is important. Success is imperative.

"Good night, *Fräulein!*"

"Good night, Herr Dokter!"

The doctor hurried out. The *Fräulein* watched him go and sat looking at the door which had closed upon him.

For an hour she sat in deep and somber thought; about her beautiful, calm eyes a look of utter loneliness. At last she got to her feet and, catching sight of her reflection in a mirror, she smiled bitterly.

"The genius of the empire!" she muttered. "In love with a libertine and assisted by a coxcomb! And I must use both. Thank God, I have not the spirit of prophecy."

Perhaps, in that dread of the future, she was on the outskirts, at any rate, of divination.

There was a soft knock on the door, and in response to Bertha's "Come in," Frederick Schlatter entered.

"Something to report already?" Bertha asked. "Or are you merely tired of obeying orders."

"Your orders were to watch the house until I gathered that the girl had been missed and then report what I had seen. I've come to do that. This is my day for real discoveries."

"Yes?"

"Did you ever hear of Commander Hadley?"

"Hadley! Listen, Frederick! Do you know how other naval experts compute the strength of the United States navy? Weight, armament, speed, and Hadley. He is the greatest authority on naval gunnery in the world."

"Well, very soon he'll be gunning for kidnapers. I hope he's something less of an authority on that."

"Tell me about it, and try to remember that facts are more important than persiflage."

"Bertha, I love your sense of humor. It's so consistently unobtrusive."

"It is even larger than my patience, *mein Herr.* Report!"

"Certainly, *Fräulein!* Finding the iron gate of the basement of Herr Nicholson's house had not been fastened when the servants returned I concluded that probably the inner door had been left unlocked also. I tried it and found it so. I went in. There was a light from the servants' sitting-room in the rear. Above, I heard some one answering a telephone and then a man ran down the staircase and said, 'Commander Hadley is on the phone raising merry hell, Tim. He wants to speak to you.'

"I saw a man in a chauffeur's uniform run up-stairs and heard him talking with the commander. From what I gathered, Herr Nicholson was engaged with the Unification Board and didn't know there was anything wrong. Hadley was evidently at Nicholson's Cove. From the conversation between the servants afterward it seems to be taken for granted that the commander and Miss Nicholson are practically engaged."

"You know Mexico well, I believe, Frederick?"

"It isn't the same sweet spot half an hour at a time, but I have a general idea of it. What has that to do with Hadley?"

"Nothing! Do you want to babble all night about things we can only speculate about until we get more facts? Dr. Brunner is away on a mission. When he returns I shall want you to start immediately for Washington, and from there to Mexico City. For the first time I am introducing you into the big operations of our government. In Mexico you will be introduced to certain agents. They are all prepared to receive you and are waiting only certain assurances and certain information from our ambassador at Washington before com-

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ing to an agreement for the most astounding *coup de main* Germany has ever conceived.

"These assurances and this information, which is not, I may say, strictly accurate, you will take. If you are successful you will be among the greatest men in Germany. If you fail you will, sooner or later, be killed."

"And if I decline?"

"You will have failed."

"Huh! Is it treasonable to quote Shakespeare? 'And some have greatness thrust upon them.'"

Fire leaped into the *Fräulein's* eyes. She stepped close to Schlatter and seized him by both arms, looking into his eyes, her face for once showing a passion that was almost despair.

"Frederick! *Mein liebe!* You *must* be great," she said. "I am giving you this great opportunity because I love you. I have banked my soul on your will to be great. You must not fail me. Fail, and we are both lost. Succeed, and I am yours."

Before he could recover from his astonishment she was gone.

Schlatter stood for a moment in stunned bewilderment. He took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead, moist with cold sweat for the second time that evening.

"I love you, *Fräulein,*" he muttered, "but I love soft living and less hazardous delights better. You will have to look—"

The door opened and a man servant entered.

"The *Fräulein* instructs that you stay in this house to-night, *mein Herr,*" he said. "I am to show you to your room."

CHAPTER VI.

ENTER TRAGEDY.

THE servant led Schlatter up one flight of stairs and showed him into a room that was next to the one occupied by Marian.

"I would suggest that you do not undress yet, *mein Herr,*" the man said. "I believe there is another communication for you."

He stepped outside and locked the door. Then he made a peculiar rubbing motion on the door of Marian's room, fitted a key in the lock and turned it. The door opened and Nada stepped out.

Turning, she locked the door again and followed the man into another room that faced the top of the stairs and the room occupied by Schlatter.

"You were right about the girl being Eric Nicholson's daughter, Martin," Nada whispered when the door was closed.

"Yes, *mein Fraulein.* I was sure of the car as soon as I heard the name, though it was too dark to see the coat-of-arms."

"Have you discovered what the object is?"

"Yes, *mein Fräulein.* She is to be held as surety for certain information about the American plans and defenses. If these are not forthcoming she is to be killed, as a warning that the dear ones of the highest in the land will not be safe if Germany is defied."

"My God, Martin! Germany! Our dear Fatherland of kind people and loving parents and sweet children! What a burden of hate and shame she must bear forever! And all because she has been simple-hearted and loyal to her tyrants. What else have you learned?"

"The U-57 is expected at her previous rendezvous. I haven't been able to learn where that is yet. Brunner has been sent to receive certain documents from her. I don't know what they are except that they are for the ambassador, and have to deal with Mexico and Japan. Schlatter is to be entrusted with them to Washington and with whatever mission to Mexico and Japanese agents there they entail."

"And the girl? Is she to be disposed of before that mission?"

"I don't think the two ventures are in any way related. I think Schlatter will try to avoid the Mexican mission if possible, and I think he blundered into the other by accident. He also discovered that Commander Hadley is the girl's fiancé. He has been ordered to stay in this house. I have put him in that room."

"I'll see him. You will wait outside the door. If I call you by name come quickly."

"Suppose the *Fräulein* comes?"

"Let her into Miss Nicholson's room

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and say that I have gone to my own for my comb. I have the comb here."

Martin unlocked Schlatter's door and Nada stepped into the room.

Schlatter sprang to his feet in beaming surprise.

"Nada!" he cried softly, stepping toward her with hands outstretched.

She halted him by pulling a chair in front of her.

"You are too impetuous," she said. "Did you think I'd come to make love to you?"

"Of course!"

"You are very insolent, *mein Herr.* I am not so easily won that you can get me by making me jealous."

"Jealous, Nada?"

"Why did you bring the Nicholson girl here?"

Schlatter laughed indulgently.

"Oh, Nada! Nada! Should I kidnap a girl with appendicitis for the purpose of making so wondrously healthy a person as you jealous? She is a prisoner of war, my sweetheart."

"Please do not call me your sweetheart. I'm not—yet. What do you mean by a prisoner of war?"

"Perhaps I should say a hostage to prevent war."

"I think you're insane."

"No! Didn't you know that we of this particular establishment are very important cogs in the diplomatic machine of the Fatherland?"

"I know the *Fräulein* is somebody to be obeyed for the benefit of the Fatherland, but that doesn't involve robbing men of their daughters."

"Oh, yes it does! And killing them if the price of their lives is not forthcoming. We are nice people."

"And you kidnaped that girl for that purpose!"

"Not I! I kidnaped her for the purpose of getting half a million or so in ransom, but the *Fräulein* saw greater possibilities, and instead, I am to get the Iron Cross."

"For kidnaping a girl! The Iron Cross is becoming a very distinguished mark."

"Isn't it? Personally I'd prefer the half million. But this is to benefit the Fatherland."

"How?"

"America is threatening to break off diplomatic relations and perhaps declare war. Miss Nicholson's father will give us information that will make that a matter of satisfaction to us."

"But why are they going break with us?"

"You know that well enough. We have, in the course of our naval operations destroyed some of their citizens and property."

"Murdered helpless non-combatants! And to justify it and make it safe and profitable we are either going to force that poor father to be a traitor to his country, or we will murder his sick and helpless daughter. We are becoming a very powerful, noble, and dignified nation."

"It is all for the good of the Fatherland, Nada."

"How?"

"Would you have us defeated?"

"We should have been in no danger of defeat if we had not started the war, should we? We started it because a Hapsburg was murdered in a country that was willing to punish the criminal; willing even to arbitrate Austria's right to punish him. If the great Germany was willing to start that war it was because the great Germany was drunk with Hohenzollernism. The Hohenzollerns wanted greater empire to justify their absolutism.

"What glory is it to the German people if the empire is extended? The German people don't rule it, and all the good of the Fatherland that they are pouring out their lives and treasures and good name for, is not for the first elementary good of self-government."

"You are astonishing me more and more, Nada," said Schlatter, looking in still half-amused perplexity at her. "Who are you?"

"I am the women of Germany, and the fathers and mothers of Germany. They have decided to speak to the New World through me, when the time is ripe, and what we may ask of the New World, for the sake of democracy and of our unborn children, is, war upon the Hohenzollerns."

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"If you are to be the petitioner it will be granted, Nada. I would declare war on Mephistopheles at your request."

"Prove it by giving back the girl."

"And the reward?"

"Will be sure."

The door was flung wide open. Standing inside the doorway was Bertha, cold, calm, and terrible, with only the paleness of her chiseled features betraying the passion that was raging within her. Beside her, at military attention, stood two men.

"You make sure of your rewards by being largely inclusive, don't you, Frederick?" she asked softly.

Schlatter's face had gone deathly gray, but his pale lips smiled.

"How could I be confident of such good fortune in either case, Bertha?" he said. "My premonitions appear to have been sound."

"Quite!"

Nada, as cool as her mistress and rival, turned without undue haste and surveyed the invading forces.

"I am only anxious to know, highness, what has become of my faithful Martin," she said.

Bertha gave her a brief glance.

"You also seem to know too much," she replied. "Martin knew too much." Then, turning to one of the men: "Bring him in," she ordered.

The man saluted and stepped back. There was a dragging sound in the hall, and the man returned and threw the body of Martin to the floor in front of his mistress. The life had already stopped gurgling from a gaping wound in his throat.

"That is horrible murder!" gasped Nada, white as chalk, but repressing the horror that seemed compelling her to faint.

"It is execution," said Bertha. "He was a spy and a traitor to Germany. You also are a traitor. We shall try not to disfigure you so badly, however. You will be sent to a submarine, whose commander will carry out his orders—at his leisure. Take her!"

"Not yet!"

Schlatter, very white, but intensely in earnest, had swung an automatic from his pocket, and the muzzle was pointing straight at the heart of the *Fräulein*.

"So help me God, Bertha, before I'll allow you to murder that poor girl I'll kill you. I've lived a useless and unscrupulous life. I may as well lend it a little touch of heroics before I give it up. Give the order to let her pass."

Bertha looked into the eyes of the man she loved and read there the almost insane exaltation of a life's one great moment.

"Let her pass," she commanded.

"Walk behind the *Fräulein*, Nada," said Schlatter through clenched teeth. "Leave the house at once. Never mind clothes or money. Get out and hide and don't interfere with these people. They're too strong for you. I shall never see you again. Good-by!"

Nada turned and looked back at him from the doorway.

"You could come, too," she said.

"Hurry and get out," snapped Schlatter. "I'd kill her for your sake, but I can't do it if I dilute the motive. Good-by, Nada!"

"You are giving your life for the Fatherland. Good-by! Highness, I hope that this will be your last—execution."

They stood there after she had gone.

"Frederick," said the *Fräulein*, "you have made me let go the one person who, I have just discovered, can ruin all our hopes in America and perhaps wreck the empire. She is a traitor. The Nicholson girl has already been drugged and sent to another place. Nada can do us no harm in that matter, unless Miss Nicholson should die. But she has discovered so much of our plans that many of them will be rendered useless."

"You shouldn't have waited to take her in my presence. I seem to have retained a few—scruples, or something."

"I couldn't help it. I had only just discovered that she is the person I have been warned to look out for above all people. You have brought me to the verge of ruin."

He took the pistol by the barrel and held it out to her.

"I know what that means," he said. "I only ask that you will not tempt me by delay. Not being a militarist I don't care to fight a woman."

She turned to the two men and pointed to the body of Martin.

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"Take it away, and get everything ready to leave here in ten minutes," she ordered.

Then she stepped close to Schlatter and pushed the weapon aside.

"Even the libertines of Germany are brave," she said. "I have discovered that you are too brave to die yet, Frederick. There is other work for you to do. Perhaps the retrieving of our plans. But first I have discovered that there is only one way to hold you, and I am going to hold you this time to the death. You will never be uncertain again of your reward. Kiss me, Frederick."

She stood very close to him, her beautiful, sensuous body enveloping him with its intoxicating aura. She passed her arms under his; her face turned up to him; her eyes burning into his being.

He flung his arms about her and held her tight, and their lips met in a long, unchaste abandonment. The Genius of Germany had sealed the bargain of her own sale for her own ends.

"I love you," she said, though her soul said, of herself and of him: "I hate you."

She drew herself away.

"We must go," she said. "This is what I want you to do. You know Hadley?"

"Yes, I have met him once or twice in clubs. He thinks I am an Irishman."

"Good! You must go to him. He is on his way to New York. Nada will probably take her information either to the police or to the secret-service men—who will need a warrant in this stupidly free country before they can come here—or she will make for Nicholson Cove. I have information that Nicholson will go straight on to Washington, while Hadley will conduct the search for the girl in New York. Our agent in Nicholson's house—who has been able to gather very little for us because of Nicholson's fiendish ingenuity—ascertained that much.

"Hadley will go first to the Fifth Avenue house to get the chauffeur before going to the secret-service man, Mearson. By keeping him away from Nada we shall get an hour or two start, which is all we need. You will be waiting there for him. What you must say to him I will tell you as we ride in my car. I must start now. I am going to the U-boat rendezvous. With Nada loose, I shall have to refortify all my plans, but if you do your part well we shall still win the game with a no-trump hand."

CHAPTER VII.

GIVING THEM ROPE.

SCHLATTER gave himself up to the unescapable current of his destiny with a dazed fatalism. The whirlpool of Bertha's fascination and mental power, and the appalling and mysterious force called the Empire, had snatched him into a bewildered fealty, in which he had ceased to think, and ceased almost to feel.

He had tried to escape. He had determined to get what he could for the information about Marian, and pass into comfortable obscurity with Nada—if she would go with him—rather than live on the dizzy and dangerous heights with Bertha; but Bertha, imperious, overmastering, had swept him away from his dreams of ease and security and drugged him with the insidious opiate of her charms.

His incipient fear of her had been strengthened by Nada's greeting of "Highness"; for the German awe of royalty and near-royalty was enveloping as a superstition, in spite of his long residence in a democracy. Her yielding to him had become a proportionately dizzying and incredible experience.

And so he accepted without debate her instructions, stunned into a blind resolve to play the hand Fate had thrust upon him for a stake so exalted that his dazed mind felt it to be either Fate's trap or Fate's challenge. He resolved to accept the challenge.

It was almost midnight when, hovering at a point of vantage, Schlatter saw a hurrying limousine grind to a halt in front of the Nicholson house. Before it had quite stopped, Schlatter, apparently in great haste, was half-way up the front steps.

Then, as if his attention had been attracted by the arrival of the car, he turned and ran down the steps again as Commander Hadley got out.

"Oh, Hadley, is that you?" he panted,

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as if laboring under suppressed excitement. "This is where Mr. Nicholson lives, isn't it? You're engaged to Miss Nicholson, aren't you?"

"Slatterley! What is it, man? What is it?" demanded Bert, gripping Schlatter by both arms. "Do you know anything about her?"

"Yes, come on! There isn't a moment to be lost. I'll tell you as we ride. Tell the man to drive to the pier at East 118th Street; I have a fast motor-boat there, and we'll catch them if we hurry like sin. Get in."

Tim, on the lookout, had seen the car stop and rushed out.

"Any news, sir?" he asked Hadley.

"Get in with Russell and tell him to drive like hell to the pier at East 118th Street," snapped Bert. "There seems to be some mystery here. What is it, Slattery?"

The car sped across town.

"Abduction, Hadley! By thunder, it almost cost me my life once to-night, but I'll stop it if it costs it outright. God, I didn't think such things could go on under our very noses in these days. Those Germans are incredible."

"Calm down, old man, and tell me about it quickly," said Bert, convinced by the reference to Germans that the man knew what he was talking about, and touched by his emotion and the implied risk of his life.

"I have a suite in a house two blocks below Nicholson's, between Fifth and Madison," Schlatter began, more calmly. "I've heard in some way lately, or I've developed the impression, that the woman occupying the house next door is a German spy.

"One night during the summer I had gone to the roof, as I frequently did in the hot weather. I heard words, in German, from the roof of the next house, and, though I'm not very familiar with the language, and the conversation was low, I noticed the recurrence—in precise, business tones, not as one argues—of such words as Kaiser, *der Vaterland,* Von Jagow, Von Bernstorff; and whoever was addressing the woman spoke with almost servile respect.

"This and perhaps something I had heard, servant's gossip possibly, made me weave an atmosphere of German intrigue about the house. I mention this to explain my conduct to-night.

"I was sitting in a window, with no light in my room, a habit of mine, looking out upon the street, thinking, when I saw a car drive up to the house next door and stop, and, to my surprise, Miss Nicholson was helped out, evidently quite ill. She looked about her in a dazed way, and the man who had driven her up spoke to her. She seemed about to collapse, put her arm over his shoulder when he picked her up bodily and carried her into the house.

"Of course I could do nothing but speculate, and my speculations might be wildly wrong and ridiculous. At I sat there wondering, the chauffeur of the woman whom I had heard addressed as '*Fräulein,*' came out and took the car away. A few minutes later the famous surgeon, Dr. Brunner, came to the house. I remembered distinctly that a secret-service friend of mine had told me that the authorities had their suspicions of Brunner. Then I suddenly remembered that Miss Nicholson's father was head of some great board or something, engaged in organizing the defenses and resources of the country.

"First I thought I would call up the Nicholson house and ask if anything was wrong; but I reflected that it might be a perfectly regular and harmless visit, and certainly the girl did not seem to be coerced, and that I might make myself ridiculous and perhaps unnecessarily alarm the family.

Still, the events seemed to fit so well into my intrigue atmosphere I determined, in a spirit of adventure, and perhaps knight-errantry, to investigate. I did it, by way of the roof. I got into the *Fräulein's* house, and heard things that gave me the horrors. I must cut the details short and merely outline now my own narrow escape, the murder of a servant the *Fräulein* had discovered was about to help Miss Nicholson, and the escape of a girl servant similarly disposed.

"Briefly, Miss Nicholson was taken from the house hurriedly. She is to be placed on a submarine somewhere up the Sound. This submarine has penetrated there for the second or third time. It is one of six

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that are on this side. She is being taken first in a motor-boat up the Hudson, and the *Fräulein,* who had to leave a little later, has motored to a spot somewhere about Fort Washington Park, where she is to be picked up. The boat is a full cabin launch named, appropriately, the Stealaway.

"She will lose a good deal of time picking up the *Fräulein,* and that is where we shall have a chance to overhaul her. I was hidden in a closet in the room the *Fräulein* was in, and couldn't leave until she did. As soon as she had gone I ran to my own rooms and telephoned the police department. The river patrol boat has been put out of service by an explosion of some kind in her machinery, but they sent two men, armed with rifles, up to my launch, the Ghost."

"But how are we going to identify the Stealaway in the dark? There are scores of full-cabin launches."

"Easily! She is going to carry violet lights at bow and stern, as a signal to certain spies on shore, and as markers for the submarine to pick her out by. The Ghost is a former racing boat, and she is in good tune. The Stealaway will be in the East River, and, perhaps, in the Sound, before we can head her off, but we can eventually overhaul her. Here we are."

"I think I needn't try to express our gratitude, just now at all events, Slatterley," said Bert, seizing Schlatter's hand as the car came to a halt.

"No," returned Schlatter, almost roughly. "This is no time for it. Come on."

"You come with us, Tim," Bert ordered. "Russell, wait at the house until you hear from Mr. Nicholson. Tell him— Here, give him this note. If he telephones, read it to him."

He pulled a memorandum-book from his pocket, scribbled a dozen words on it by the light of a street-lamp, and handed it to Russell.

"See if you can read it."

He didn't wait for an answer. He had merely given an order to Russell to read the note. With Schlatter and Tim he dashed through a gate, and within thirty seconds the Ghost was pushing her nose out into the East River.

The Ghost was a queer-looking craft; narrow forward and amidships, but giving an impression of width at the stern by reason of being cut off square, as if there hadn't been enough timber to finish her. She was about thirty feet long, and engined like a battle-ship.

Since her racing days her exhausts had been turned under water, and a half cabin superstructure was begun but not half finished. Her name might more appropriately have been the Skeleton rather than the Ghost.

She could travel, however; and, though she threatened to shake herself to pieces, she threw the waters of the East River behind her with vicious defiance.

Two men in uniform greatcoats were already on the boat when Schlatter, Bert, and Tim arrived. They were seated on a bench that ran around her, and grunted "Good evening!" as the three came aboard.

"Have you been told what this expedition is?" asked Hadley.

"Yes, sir. River police work!" answered one of them. "We're to follow the owner's orders. Are you the owner, sir?"

"No; this gentleman is. We're hunting for a boat that will show violet markers at bow and stern. It's United States navy service, and you'll be under my command. I'm Commander Hadley."

"Very well, sir," answered the man.

A third man had started the engine, and by the time this conversation had ended the boat was nosing swiftly toward the Sound.

Hadley turned to Schlatter:

"If the woman left the house only a little while before you, her boat can't possibly have made its way through the Harlem River yet," he suggested.

"I was trying for nearly half an hour to get track of Mr. Nicholson before I found you," Schlatter answered.

"Oh! Seeing that you had two men, it would have been better if you'd started in pursuit at once. You would—"

"There she is, just working into the Kills," Schlatter interrupted. "Give her all she can stand."

He pointed ahead. Just speeding into the channel between Randall's Island and

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the mainland were two violet lights. For a moment they were lost to sight, but as the Ghost howled her way around Randall's Island they picked them up again.

Apart from any sinister application, the Stealaway was well named. If she did not actually steal away from the Ghost, she kept that pursuing specter from making any visible gain as they shot through the Kills, past Port Morris, past North Brother Island light, and into the open Sound. She put City Island on her port bow, and here a nasty cross wind from the north shore seemed to prove better sea qualities in the Ghost. She crept nearer and nearer. As they raced past Execution Light, to port, and Sands Point, to starboard, the boats were not more than a hundred yards apart.

The wind, with frost in it, made a gale by the mad speed, bit to the bone. Hadley sprang to the wheel as they reached for the two lights.

"She's making too close to Sand's Point!" he shouted. "She'll have to swing over a couple of points to get around Cow's Neck. We'll head her off."

And he held the Ghost's nose to the point of the bluff that bends out beyond the Sand's Point light-house, squeezing the Stealaway, which was now trying to get sea-room for a swing to port.

The Ghost's course had given her the extra gain she needed, and was bringing her, bow on, across the course desired by the Stealaway. The Stealaway's siren screamed hysterically, and the Ghost gave a point, coming along the lee side of the larger boat and racing side by side with her.

"Ahoy the Stealaway!" roared Bert's mighty seaman's voice.

A window in the side of the Stealaway's cabin dropped.

"Ahoy!" came a hail. "What boat's that, and what are you chasing us for?"

"United States naval auxiliary, Ghost, Hadley commanding. Heave to while we board you."

"What do you want?"

"Heave to!"

"Sure, Mike! Sure! Don't wrench your voice bolts loose."

The Stealaway dropped into slow speed and then stopped. The Ghost kept enough steerageway to edge close up to her; then she stopped, also.

Bert, followed by Schlatter and the two armed men, sprang aboard the Stealaway, taking a painter, which he made fast to a stanchion.

"Make her fast forrard, too," he ordered the mechanician.

Then he turned to confront a huge man in a pilot jacket and a vizored cap.

"You in command?" he asked.

"In a way. I run the boat."

"Under whose orders?"

"Owner's."

"Owner aboard?"

"Yes."

"Bring him here."

"It's a woman."

"Bring her here, then."

"Here she is."

A woman, wrapped in a long coat, with a filmy substance thrown over her head and around her throat, opened the door of the cabin and took a couple of steps forward, peering.

"What have we stopped for, Otto? And who are these men?" she demanded.

Bert touched his cap in salute. "Your boat is under detention by the United States Navy, *Fräulein,*" he answered. "I am Commander Hadley."

"Indeed! That is very peculiar, isn't it?" she asked with the attractive precision of a foreigner who speaks perfect but infrequent English. "What are we arrested for?"

"I have information that you are forcibly abducting the person of a United States citizen, Miss Marian Nicholson, and that you intend to place her aboard a foreign boat."

"Miss Nicholson is aboard, certainly. She is my guest, and ill. Do you care to see her?"

"I wish to see her."

The woman opened the cabin door and stood aside for him to enter. Then she followed him, closing the door.

"I'll see if she's awake," she said, opening another door to the right. "Ah, yes! Commander Hadley has come to see you,

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dear. Keep still, now; I'll let him right in. Come in, commander."

Hadley looked inside.

"Hello, Madcap!" he called. "Just a second while I give orders to turn back."

He opened the outer door.

"Cast off the forrard painter and take the Ghost in tow. Put back into the New York Navy-Yard," he ordered. "Call me when you raise their lights."

Then he stepped back.

"Are we still under arrest, Herr Officer?" asked Bertha, who stood behind him.

"Temporarily, *Fräulein*," he answered. "It would be impossible to take Miss Nicholson back by any other boat."

"Ah! Just so! Pray go in and let Miss Nicholson assure you that she is a willing guest."

She stood aside for him to enter Marian's room and closed the door after him.

Marian, unable to sit up, put out both her hands to him.

"Is it you, Bert, or am I delirious?" she asked. "I left Etta's to avoid you and you find me in the middle of the ocean somewhere after I've been whirled madly over half the world."

"I'm a hard man to lose, Madcap," said Bert, holding her hands and smiling into her feverish eyes. "It isn't quite the middle of the ocean, however. It's Long Island Sound."

"I heard you tell them to put back to the Navy Yard. We're moving now. How did you find me?"

"Listen, Marian, and remember that though the situation's uncomfortable you're not likely to be in danger. I didn't find you. They led me to you. I'm only a side issue, but I might make a big difference to them in a pinch. They saw a good chance to eliminate me and at the same time sidetrack the hunt for you, so they baited a trap for me.

"I didn't even know that it would lead to you—I suppose that it was their only resource—but I walked into it because they let out that there's a submarine in the Sound somewhere, and I believe it's true. The only reason the Deutschland came was to take observations of currents and channels. The men who came with me are not river police. They're German navy men. I knew it as soon as I saw them. They don't know that I suspect. It's my business not to get killed, but to find out where that submarine is and what she's come for. That's why I walked into their silly trap and why I'm following it without making any fight or seeming suspicions. I'm glad it led me to you. How are you feeling?"

"Better since you came."

She told him what little she knew and guessed about Nada, and Bertha, and the others.

"They bumped me about a good deal, but otherwise they've taken good care of me," she commented. "I think I was drugged part of the time. I seemed to dream about being bumped and then I awoke, rocked in the cradle of the deep. Did you know I'd been kidnaped—I suppose I have?"

"Yes. They took care to let us know."

"Father knows, of course."

"Oh, yes! They telephoned to him, offering terms. They are German secret agents. Their terms for your surrender were certain maps and other vital information about the defenses of the country."

"Is it possible? Aren't they the most ridiculous people in the world! They'd die a hundred times rather than give up such information about Germany, and yet they think all they have to do to get it from some other country's citizens is to kidnap a girl and demand it. What is my father doing?"

"He went to Washington to beg the President for delay in breaking off relations until we had a chance to discover you. The task of doing that he left to me for the time being."

"Well, you did it promptly enough, though it was merely incidental. You were really leaving it, of course."

"Of course! A submarine in the harbor, in case war was declared, could work untold damage. My duty was clear, though it broke my heart, and I was praying that the two things might work into the same set of events. Marian, dear—"

"Bert, listen; just a minute!"

"Well?"

"You're not going to propose to me while I'm helpless, with an ice-bag on my

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appendix, and both of us prisoners of German war?"

"I was thinking of doing that. Do you mind? Of course you're in no danger, but it's quite likely they'll trump up some excuse for killing me."

"Don't, Bert! I'm too weak to be brave enough for such flippancy. If you'd thought you hadn't better than an even chance you wouldn't have come, because you would be wasting a life valuable to the country. It's very cruel of you to try to frighten me into saying something."

"Forgive me, Marian. I was really trying to take your mind off your troubles. Please don't cry."

"Off my troubles! Don't you think you're one of my troubles? Anybody would imagine I could fiddle while you were being slain. To talk about being killed is an inspired thought for taking a girl's mind off her troubles."

"I meant by proposing to you."

"That's just as bad."

"Ah! Thank you!"

"Yes, it is, Bert Hadley, and you needn't look hurt about it. I'd quite made up my mind to say yes next time you asked me, and then you ask me when I'm all frowsy and ill and kidnaped and all sorts of unpleasant and unromantic things."

"I'm very sorry, Marian. Of course I didn't actually ask you, so you needn't change your mind about the next time."

"That's so, isn't it? I didn't mean to be rough with you, Bert."

The big sailor laughed softly and picked up one little hand from the bedclothes and kissed it.

"You're a very rough person," he admitted, "but you have such nice ways of making up, you make people look for trouble."

"You haven't told me yet how you got here, nor where you think we're going," she reminded him. "Tell me while I rest."

He related the story of Schlatter's heroic and quite imaginary detective work, the arousing of his own suspicions, and a hint of the steps he had taken to nullify the plotting as far as possible.

"I don't know what I'm going to do," he admitted. "If there's a submarine I hope they'll try to imprison me in it, or do something that will give me an idea of where it is. I can only take one step at a time, but clearly the first step was to try to verify the presence of the U-boat and find out if possible where she lies. I'm going out now to see where we're heading for. I bet it isn't the New York Navy Yord. Try to get some sleep."

She put up her hands to him again as he rose.

"I'm only a girl, Bert, and I'm awfully, awfully frightened. They're terrible people, and I don't know what they'll do to you."

"Nothing! I shall act like a pacifist."

"Or a Belgian relief-boat, or a hospital-ship, or the Lusitania. None of them offered fight. None of them had a chance. There's no use in blinking it, Bert. We're both apt to be killed if it happens to suit their convenience.

"They're not murderers in the ordinary sense of the word. They feel a fanatical justification for everything. The answer to everything is 'Der Vaterland' or 'Der Kaiser,' and they believe they're right. That's why we're in such danger. They're good people gone mad.

"Perhaps I shall never see you again, Bert, but I shall be proud of you and proud of having been proud to give you to our dear country. Just now it can't be a question of marrying, or promising, or anything but tragedy hanging about us. Kiss me, Bert."

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE KISS TOO MANY.

BERT stepped out into the main cabin. The spokesman of the two men who had come with him in the Ghost stood near the door. The owner of the Stealaway sat at a small table, facing the door Hadley had closed behind him.

"Is the patient asleep, Herr Officer?" she asked.

"No, but I think she will be in a moment. She is very tired."

"I hope you didn't disturb her too much. She has had a good deal of sleep, but she needs a lot."

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"And some of it wasn't entirely natural, was it?"

"Not entirely; but just as beneficial. I had to give her a quite harmless drug to save her the discomfort of riding by automobile. Are you convinced that she is not a prisoner?"

"She seemed to think it rather outside her calculations that she should be at sea. I'm willing to ask no questions after she is restored to her family in safety, however."

"You could ask none that would embarrass us, Herr Officer, I assure you. In fact, you may begin at once if you wish."

"First, I must go outside and get our bearings."

"I don't think you'd better. It would probably ruffle your temper, and, with no ladies present, you might swear."

"Still, I think I shall do it. I enjoy swearing on occasion."

"I think you'd better not. The man behind you isn't our best marksman, but his rifle-muzzle is so close to your back he could hardly miss."

"What do you mean, *Fräulein?* The man is under my own command."

"No, *mein Herr*. He is under mine. The uniform great-coat and cap are the only essentials for producing river police from German sailors on a dark night. You have been outwitted, *mein Herr*."

Bert laughed.

"Rather elaborate machinery for such small game," he observed. "Besides, I hadn't heard of the declaration of war."

"You were in our way, Herr Officer, and in case of war you might have been even more so. I'm sorry, but the man will have to search you for weapons. Kindly put up your hands."

"It isn't necessary. I am unarmed."

"Nevertheless—"

"Nevertheless nothing, *Fräulein!* I have just given you the word of an American officer that I am unarmed."

"For the present it is enough. Later, others will probably wish to search you for papers and so forth. If you are sensible you will be returned to your country after the war—which, I fear, is imminent—unless your own countrymen kill you in the meantime."

"Are we, then, to be taken to Germany?"

"You are, after partaking in a certain exploit. Miss Nicholson we expect to release."

"I'm glad to hear that. Her father is very troubled. My sister's home is not very far from here. You might put her ashore there if you will."

"Not to-night?"

"Why not?"

"Our terms have not yet been met."

"Oh! You anticipate that they will be?"

"I think your people know us. We are too strong to shrink. When we threaten, we carry out the terms of the threat. The same applies in regard to you. If you refuse to forward the exploit I have mentioned you will be killed."

"What is the exploit? I suppose treason and frightfulness are the main features."

Bertha rose to her feet.

"Those are words, *mein Herr,*" she said, "words that define the scruples of the weak. Let me show you facts. Our country is fighting for its life. We are surrounded by an iron ring. British domination of the sea has cut off our normal food supply. We are not babies to cry out 'We yield!' because we are hungry. It is our God-appointed mission to win, and purge the world of the slothfulness and waste and inefficiency and wickedness that have been degenerating the human race beyond our borders.

"We are the ministers of the new civilization, which we call Kultur, and the destroyers of the old effeminacy and waste. The Kaiser is the new Prophet of God, bearing a new gospel; an economic, industrial gospel; a gospel of physical and mental efficiency. To prove our calling and election we must pass through fire and bear fire, shrinking not; undaunted and undefeated."

"It seems to be an unnecessary sacrifice, *Fräulein*. The world doesn't seem to be as inefficient as you suspected; the British Navy, for example!"

"*One* thing, Herr Hadley! The one thing that puts us to the proof. The one thing appointed to test us. But German efficiency begins with the cradle and per-

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meates every activity of every life. It is magnificent and tireless. The Fatherland must be victorious. The ruthlessness of the hour leads to the vast saving and the vast mercy of the future. To be weak is to perish."

Hadley did not answer. It suddenly struck him that there was something tragic and pathetic in this woman's fanatical and contradictory sophistries; as if she vaunted these things with a firm voice and a despairing heart; as if the apostle had begun to doubt the prophet and the doctrine on the truth of which she had staked her existence.

"I want to convince you," she went on, "that treason to lesser states, which oppose this great end, is loyalty to the race. Germany must and will conquer. It is appointed."

"Have you had much success in convincing citizens of 'lesser states,' *Fräulein?*" Hadley asked.

"As yet they have been obstinate," she admitted without a smile. "In you we have an intelligent subject. I am relying upon your intelligence."

"At that rate you should have begun with the President or Mr. Roosevelt. I'm sure they have more intelligence, as well as more power than I."

Suddenly Bertha dropped her tone of exalted fanaticism, and revealed the shrewd calculator.

"Precisely," she observed dryly, "but as Mr. Roosevelt once pointed out, 'The shot that hits is the shot that counts,' and you were more apt to fire that disturbing shot than either of them—and perhaps less likely to be missed by an enraged people."

"Ah!" laughed Hadley. "Frightfulness wouldn't go as far as that, then?"

"Policy would not, my dear sir, but—"

A knock on the door halted her. The man she had addressed as Otto entered.

"We are approaching the spot mentioned, *Fräulein,*" he said, in German.

"Begin sounding the undersea signal and drop to half-speed," she ordered. "I shall be on deck in a moment. Send Franz here."

The man saluted and went out. Bertha turned once more to Hadley:

"Will you give your parole, *mein Herr?*" she asked.

He shook his head. "I am not a prisoner of war, *Fräulein.* It is impossible."

"You are a prisoner of *German* war," she answered grimly, unconsciously using the definition Marian had employed. "I regret it, but we shall have to bind your wrists and ankles. The night is dark, so we needn't blindfold you."

"Pardon, *Fräulein,*" said the guard, saluting, "no night is dark for a sailor in familiar waters."

Bertha turned on the man with swift astonishment.

"Who gave you permission to speak?" she snapped. "It is your business to take care that what Herr Hadley sees he will never tell."

The man saluted again. The man called Franz, the other pseudo river-policeman, entered.

"Manacle the Herr Commander's wrists and ankles," Bertha ordered. "Put your hands behind you, Mr. Hadley," she went on in English. "Handcuffs are a deadly weapon when the hands are in front. After you are on the submarine, which will come to the surface at our signal, you will have greater freedom."

With that she went on deck, signaling Franz to follow. Bert turned to his guard.

"You are a genial ruffian, aren't you?" he suggested, speaking in German. "I suppose the sight of an officer blindfolded is one of your ideas of pleasantry."

The guard leaned forward and spoke in English, in a whisper:

"I was only coppering my bet," he said. "Step down to the next door, but keep your back to it, and speak in whispers."

"Plots within plots!" thought Bert, doing as he was told.

The guard made a light rubbing sound on the door, which opened slightly.

"This is Commander Hadley, *Fräulein,*" the man whispered as if addressing the crack.

The door opened a little wider.

"Don't turn," came a whisper, in a woman's voice. "I am Nada. Has Miss Nicholson told you of Nada?"

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Bert nodded.

"I was plotting for her release when the *Fraülein* discovered me. The *Fraülein* is really a great princess of the Prussian house. She is the power behind the throne. You must capture her at all costs. Dr. Brunner is to get some papers the submarine has brought over. The *Fraülein* wouldn't have come herself but for my escape, which compelled her to seek safety and bring Miss Nicholson to the U-boat. She must have known that she could get here before Brunner, because she brought Schlatter, who is to be the final messenger with the documents. Brunner wouldn't know what to do with them. So Brunner cannot have gone yet.

"He will put out in a boat from the shore as soon as he sees the submarine's signal, and he and Schlatter will probably go back with the papers, while the *Fraülein*, discovering your absence, will try to escape in the submarine. You must have the passages to the sea closed."

"I've done that. Gave a note to chauffeur who's a government man. How am I to escape?"

"Kuhn says the Ghost is in tow. There's a doorway there, near the bow, leading to the tiny forward deck. There'll be nobody there. The lookout will be from the upper deck. I'm going to unfasten your irons. Put them in your pocket. You may need them.

"You must drop as quietly as possible into the water and swim to the Ghost. Kuhn says he whispered to your man to try to stay aboard her. The mechanician is our man, also. Kuhn will come with you. *Fraülein* would shoot him with her own pistol if he remained. The first thing, if the sea passages are closed, is to watch out for Brunner and head him off on the return trip so as to get the documents. Step back so that I can reach you."

Bert was about to step back, but before he could do so the door opened and Schlatter appeared.

"You're to come on deck, Hadley," he announced. "First I must see if you're properly restricted. You might take a notion to strangle me."

"You flatter yourself," answered Bert indifferently.

"I'm glad of it. I'll look at your irons just the same."

He stepped behind Bert and bent down to examine the handcuffs.

"I'm glad she didn't kill you, Frederick," came a soft voice from behind him.

Schlatter spun around.

"Nada!" he gasped.

Nada had opened the door a little wider and could be plainly seen, smiling into the face of the surprised Schlatter.

"I thought she would kill you," she said. "You behaved wonderfully. Was she too strong, or too sweet for you?"

"Both, Nada! This is madness for you to be here."

"No! It was madness for you to come. All the *Fraülein's* plans are known and you are surrounded. There is still a chance for you. Commander Hadley and Kuhn are about to escape. You may go with them."

"No, Nada! The *Fraülein* is too strong for me—and for you. I don't think she can be conquered."

"I thought you loved me, Frederick!"

"I do," laughed Schlatter. "I love all pretty women. Now, I must take the prisoner on deck or the *Fraülein* will think I don't appreciate her favors."

"One kiss before you go, *mein* Frederick," whispered Nada, pleadingly.

"By all means," he laughed, stepping towards her.

She pulled the door further open and stepped into the circle of his arms, with face upturned.

He bent his head to take the kiss, but it was never given. The smile on his face became a wide-eyed gasp of terror, incredibly horrible; then he crumpled to the floor, dead; a dagger in his heart.

Nada stepped over him and swiftly unlocked the handcuffs.

"Drag him to the steps by the door, Kuhn," she commanded. "He sought one kiss too many. Poor fellow! It was cruel that he should be the one stumbling-block!"

Bert had no pity to waste on Schlatter.

"What about Miss Nicholson?" he

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asked, as he put the handcuffs and key into his pockets.

"We shall try to take care of her, but she'll have to take a chance. She's in no danger unless she's put on the submarine, and your people fire on it. Now run; and God be with you."

Kuhn passed her his rifle and they ran. The door was not locked. They stepped out onto the narrow space in front of the superstructure, hugging the cabin wall to keep from view.

Suddenly the water began to heave and toss the boat about with extraordinary force, as if she had got into the wash of a huge ship.

"Submarine coming up," Bert whispered. "There she is; a violet light a hundred yards off the starboard bow. We'll have to make it fast."

They struck the water almost together on the port side, the sound being unnoticeable in the commotion. The boat still had a little steerage way, and a couple of strokes brought them well past the stern. Then the chill of the cold water became a warm and comforting thing compared with the chill that shook them from within.

The Ghost was not there.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN GERMANS DISAGREE.

BERTHA hurried down from the upper deck, opened the door, and, without looking into the cabin, called Schlatter to hurry. Then she went to the rail.

"Stop the engine," she ordered. "We shall foul her if we go any closer, with this sea running."

With a flashlight she made certain signals. From the conning-tower of the submarine came answering flashes. From the shore, a mile away, came still other flashes, which Bertha answered.

"Brunner is just putting out," she announced. "The commander of the submarine is coming aboard in his collapsible boat. Stand by to throw him a line, Franz. Otto, call into the cabin and tell Herr Schlatter to keep the prisoner in there."

Otto, still eying with interest the long outline of the partially submerged U-boat, pushed the cabin door open a foot or so and called:

"Stay in there now, Herr Schlatter." An order Herr Schlatter was in no danger of disobeying.

Soon the tiny blur of the collapsible boat could be detected on the gray crest of the waves, and a moment later it could be seen that one man was pulling her and another sitting in the stern scanning the Stealaway.

"We're going across your bow to get on the lee side," came a low call in German.

With a following wind and sea it was only a matter of seconds, and soon the frail little craft was edging closer in to the lee side of the Stealaway. Otto made a line fast and dropped it, and a lithe figure came over the rail with a single agile swing.

Bertha put out her hand to the officer, who swept off his hat and carried her fingers to his lips.

"You have done well, Lieutenant Von Heimer," she said.

"I am rewarded, highness," he answered humbly. "I am instructed to place this package in your hands or those of your agent."

"You have done well," she said again. "How are things going with us?"

"Have I your highness's permission to be frank?" he asked in a low tone.

Bertha's hand went to her throat in an unconscious gesture of apprehension, and she waved Otto and Franz to the upper deck.

"Tell me what you believe to be the truth," she said.

"Highness, we cannot win. Our people have endured all that flesh and blood can endure. They can continue for a while to endure to the same degree, but they demand that we win by military power before another winter, and it is impossible. The French are growing fat on British gold and British supplies, and are commanded by a genius. The British—"

Bertha stamped her foot.

"The British! The British! Have you no other word? Have you forgotten how to speak of German genius and German soldiers?"

"I have not, highness," Von Heimer an-

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swered gravely. "German genius is making bricks without straw, and German soldiers are dying magnificently as they fire inferior ammunition. No other soldiers in the world could endure the horror of it. No other army in the world could have survived the failure to take Verdun. It was then they began to realize that we cannot win."

"We can win if we have the will to win. Some of our chief men have been squeamish and chicken-hearted. That is, not the will to win. We have a weapon we have only half used. It must be used ruthlessly. Every ship on the seas must be sunk at sight. Let England feel the grip of starvation. We must sink foe and friend and neutral."

"It isn't as easy as it sounds, highness; and besides, we shall line up the United States with our enemies."

"Let them line up! This package contains a Roland for that Oliver. This will keep their insignificant army amply busy, and by the time they can raise and train and equip a real army, England will be starved. I wanted the high command to do it a year ago, but they pleaded lack of submarines. We have built enough submarines."

"Some have been eliminated, highness."

"I am, *Fräulein* here. I shall go back with you to Germany. Also, I have two prisoners to add to your ship's company. Commander Hadley, whose name you have heard—"

"Albert Hadley! Excellent!"

"And Marian Nicholson, daughter of Eric Nicholson. I have fixed a price for her release, by which we shall get their coast defense secrets. You will transfer her to the U-59, which is off the New Jersey coast, and has been signaled to await instructions to put in at Nicholson Cove for the required information."

"You are confident, then, of making the exchange?"

"Certainly! She is his only child, and he has recently buried her mother."

"My God, *Fräulein!* Do you make war by wringing broken hearts?"

"Do you criticize me, Herr Lieutenant? The hearts of our women and children and old men have been wrung. Is there a difference?"

"If your highness sees none, it is for me only to obey."

"I have stabbed my own heart to death, Herr Lieutenant. It is for the Fatherland. We shall have to transship the girl in the Stealaway's life-boat. She is ill; has narrowly escaped an attack of appendicitis. You and your man and Hadley can go by the same boat. Hadley is ironed. He has stupidly refused to give his parole."

This last touch of naïveté brought a brief smile to the lips of the lieutenant as he followed Bertha to the cabin. He stepped forward and opened the door. There were three steps from the deck to the cabin, which was in darkness. After hearing Otto's shouted command, Nada had switched off the light.

That the *Fräulein* had a fear that some disaster had occurred was indicated only by one thing—she did not ask why the lights were out, nor call to anybody to switch them on. Instead, she stood on the second step and flashed her torch into the cabin. The only human form it found lay prone at the foot of the steps.

For a second she stood, trembling uncontrollably. The hand that held the light dropped limply to her side, and the other went back blindly, in mute appeal for support, to Von Heimer.

At the touch of his hands about her she straightened up with a mighty effort, went down the remaining step, moved unfalteringly across the gruesome thing whose lips she had burned to fever heat with her own so short a time before, and switched on the light.

When she turned Von Heimer was bending over the body.

"Dead, *Fräulein!*" he announced, straightening up. "A dagger wound through the heart! Stiletto!"

Bertha threw open the door of Marian's room.

"The girl is there," she said. "Asleep!"

Von Heimer had dragged the body clear of the steps. The *Fräulein* ran up them and flung the door open.

"Otto! Franz! The prisoner Hadley has escaped. Kuhn is missing. Herr

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Schlatter is killed. Search the boat above. We will search down here."

From the pocket of her coat she pulled an automatic.

"The lockers over there, Von Heimer," she ordered, as she ran into her own room, the one Nada had been hiding in.

She switched the light on. A hatchway, approached by an iron ladder, and opening only from the inside, was open. That might be a blind.

Bertha looked around the room. A piece of paper on the tiny dressing-table caught her eye. She snatched it up and read, written in German:

> Your lover died while reaching for a kiss. I leave him for lighter lips than mine. Kiss him. He will not boast of your favors *again*. NADA.

Red, devastating rage flooded the soul of the proud woman like an avalanche of fire. The once calm eyes flashed with a rioting insanity.

She rolled the paper into a ball, hurled it to the floor and stamped on it. Then she picked it up and tore it to shreds with clawing hands, all the while giving forth little sobbing squeals like an animal in pain.

She stamped viciously on the shreds of paper, rubbing them under her feet, as if to erase their unspeakable insult.

Then she stood in the middle of the room, panting, her clenched hands pressed deep into her cheeks, her wild eyes peering out from between them into an infinity of humiliation and shame.

"God! O God!" she cried, looking up yearningly, despairingly, with all the tragic appeal of the splendid fanatic. "It was for the Fatherland! It cannot be shame! It was part of the will for victory!"

She repeated the talismanic phrase over and over; at first falteringly, as if weighing its true significance; then, with stronger resolve and renewed faith; and at last with firm conviction; low, decided, "The will for victory," and she buried the shame of her pure woman's heart beneath it and turned calmly to face Von Heimer, who knocked at the door and entered.

She pointed to the open hatchway.

"They evidently went that way. If they are not on the boat they must have swam to the motorboat we were towing and escaped that way. See if the boat is still astern."

They hurried out to the deck. Bertha seized the dangling towline.

"Gone!" she exclaimed. "Hadley will give the alarm. We must get the girl to the submarine at once, and— My God! It has vanished!"

With eager, frantic eyes they searched the heaving water for the violet marker and the long, wave-breaking line, in vain. The submarine had disappeared.

Von Heimer turned to the sailor who had rowed him.

"Did you see the 57 submerge?"

"Yes, Herr Lieutenant."

"Why didn't you report it?"

"I had no orders to report and didn't know what orders you had left, sir."

"True!"

"I was about to report, Herr Lieutenant, that a small boat is approaching to starb'd, rowed by a landsman. He is about to be stove in or swamped, sir."

"Herr Dokter Brunner," put in Bertha. "Order him to row to the lee side."

The sailor remained immovable at attention.

Von Heimer gave him a signal and instantly he sprang to the rail and gave the order. Brunner obeyed, narrowly missing coming to grief on the stern of the Stealaway.

The sailor snatched up a coil of line and neatly dropped one end of it into the doctor's lap as he came about, calling to him to ship his left oar before seizing the line and hold her steady with his right. The doctor shipped both oars and the boat immediately broached to, shipped a few gallons of water, and narrowly escaped being swamped.

The sailor managed to pull her alongside, however. Seeing that it was useless to shout further orders to the doctor, he vaulted lightly over the rail and slid down the rope into the boat, made her fast, had hoisted the astonished doctor within grasping distance of the rail, reached it himself with a leap, swung aboard, and lifted Brunner after him before that great surgeon realized whether the series of ma-

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neuvers was intended to drown him or to save his life.

The sailor saluted his officer.

"Dr. Brunner has come aboard, sir," he reported gravely.

The doctor, drenched to the skin, peered through his salt-incrusted glasses at the sailor.

"You mean Dr. Brunner has been thrown on board," he snapped. "*Fräulein,*" he went on, "when I saw the Stealaway I was sure you'd come in to meet me. My life is too valuable to the world to put in needless jeopardy in a roaring sea."

"Nonsense, Herr Dokter," Bertha snapped. "You had a following wind and a following sea. It was child's play."

"Doubtless! But it is many years since I was a child. You are unbearably autocratic. I know I have contracted pneumonia."

"You will have no chance to die of it, my friend," interposed Von Heimer, "if you speak to her highness in that tone again. Better men than you risk their lives each moment for the Fatherland. Highness—"

"*Fräulein* here, Von Heimer. I thank you. Brunner did not know."

"I did not know," said Brunner humbly. "I would give my life for your highness and be glad. Forgive me!"

"It belongs to the Fatherland, Herr Dokter," answered Bertha. "It is neither for the *Fräulein* nor for her highness, but for Germany. We are all in danger. Otto, sound the submarine signal. The underlieutenant probably submerged, thinking he saw danger. He will come up when we signal him."

"What has happened, *Fräulein?* Has some disaster brought you here?" asked Brunner.

"Nada was a traitor. Schlatter saved her from me. We brought the Nicholson girl to the boat. Nada evidently anticipated it. She was in hiding here. Schlatter inveigled Hadley here in the Ghost, and we captured him. Kuhn turned traitor and released Hadley while Nada killed Schlatter. They escaped in the Ghost, either overcoming or bribing the mechanician, who remained in the boat under the pretense of working on the engine. What has happened to the submarine we don't know, but she doesn't respond. We are surrounded by traitors and fools."

Von Heimer and his man had been conversing in low tones aside.

The lieutenant now turned to Bertha.

"The 57 does not answer the signal, *Fräulein.* You will be prepared to report that you insisted on my bringing the package to you in person?"

"I shall protect you."

"We had better not wait here any longer. What are your plans?"

"We shall work in close to the mainland, sink the boat in deep water, and make the shore in the rowboats. You'd better sink your collapsible. Brunner will locate the nearest German agent, get you and the sailor civilian clothes, and take you to where you can join the U-59. I shall go first to New York, then to Washington, and from there to Mexico. Otto and Franz will go with me to New York."

"And the girl in the cabin?"

"I said we should sink the boat in deep water."

"Then I presume Brunner and Zimmer and I take the girl with us?"

"We cannot be burdened with—"

"*Fräulein,* I am an officer in the imperial navy. I do not murder women and children. Sometimes it has been impossible for me to rescue them from ships I have been under orders to sink in the course of avowed warfare, but I will have nothing to do with your diplomatic terrorisms. Neither this boat nor the girl is of importance to the enemy."

"You will obey orders, Herr Lieutenant."

"I am an officer of the navy, not a diplomatic agent."

"Here is my commission as admiral, signed by his majesty."

Von Heimer glanced at the document without attempting to read it. He took two turns across the narrow deck, his finely cut face stern and gray in the yellow light.

"I will obey in all military matters," he said in a hard voice, "although I have already lost my ship through your orders; but neither you nor the Kaiser nor any

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superior officer is the custodian of my private virtue, and that still balks at common murder."

"Do you rebel against the Fatherland, *mein Herr?*"

At that Von Heimer flared savagely.

"How dare you? Woman of blood and iron! You make that word synonymous with wanton murder. By God, no! I don't rebel against the Fatherland! I refuse to make it an abomination by committing such crimes in its name. A German can face defeat without becoming a wild beast. Let the Hohenzollerns learn that quickly. We are a great race. We can afford defeat, but we cannot afford shame."

"This is treason," cried Bertha, beside herself. "We have spared traitors enough."

She whipped her automatic from her pocket and leveled it at the head of Von Heimer, but with the swiftness of light a strong hand flew out and wrenched it from her helpless fingers. Zimmer handed the pistol to his officer and saluted.

"The *Fräulein* is disarmed, Herr Lieutenant," he reported calmly.

"This is madness, *Fräulein,*" said Von Heimer. "You are called the Genius of the Empire, and yet you have lost the ship and tried to take the life of a faithful officer of the empire. I believe you are mad with lust to conquer."

Bertha stamped her foot. "Otto, Franz! Brunner! These men are traitors."

"And I, *Fräulein,* am very wet and unarmed," said the surgeon. "I will see if I can find some dry clothes in the cabin."

"We searched the cabin for the prisoner a few minutes ago. There are no men's clothes there, Dr. Brunner," Von Heimer assured him.

"I prefer to look for myself."

"There's a dead man in there. You will make the second if you open the door. Besides, I doubt your ability to kill even a sick woman, unless she is asleep."

"The woman should die, as a lesson to these cocksure Yankees," snarled Brunner.

"You shall die, as a lesson to the cutthroat parasites who have fattened on their wealth and liberty if you speak again, assassin. I, a U-boat officer, tell you that your tribe has made the name of Germany a reproach. And that," he added bitterly, "should indicate the nadir of contempt. And now a woman admiral tries to make us vile as you are. One step too far! Otto! I am in command."

He turned to Otto and touched the insignia upon his collar.

Otto saluted. "Yes, Herr Officer! The *Fräulein* is great, but the uniform is greater."

"Am I a prisoner?" demanded Bertha.

"God forbid, highness!" said Von Heimer fervently. "If Hadley and Kahn get clear, we may be arrested by a patrol-boat, but that can hardly be before we have had time to put you and the valiant doctor and Otto and Franz ashore. Zimmer and I have nothing worse than internment to fear. Otto, up anchor and start the engine. Franz, take the wheel. Head for the nearest mainland point. Zimmer, weight the dead body and throw it overboard. We cannot afford to air any murder charges."

Bertha turned on him savagely.

"I demand that you do not imperil me by sparing the girl. Think of all it will mean to the Fatherland, Von Heimer."

"Your highness might better have thought of that before planning such a lurid and unwholesome *coup.* You have cheapened your great birth. Does the girl know who you are?"

Bertha forgot to resent the reproach.

"I don't know what Nada might have told her," she said.

Von Heimer halted in his quick pacing as if brought up short by a bullet.

"Nada?" he exclaimed. "What Nada?"

"The girl who started this chain of treachery and insubordination. One of my house-maids."

"Ah!" Von Heimer's tone expressed profound relief.

Zimmer appeared, dragging the body of Schlatter, to which he proceeded to lash a spare anchor he had previously brought up.

Bertha turned away. Von Heimer bared his head and looked down at the sensual,

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dead face, and he, who had looked on many dead men, realized for the first time the tragic futility of the low triumphs written there—and ending there; made rotten by a pinprick.

"God have mercy on us all and forgive us!" he prayed.

"Amen!" responded Zimmer, and pushed the body through the rail.

Bertha turned sharply, as if some repressed anger had proved too much for her.

"God's mercy is for the strong," she said, her voice hard with hate. "That man was weak, sensual, untrue! His life was a hunt for women, and a woman killed him—Nada. She left me a note, taunting me with having loved him. Oh, you may as well hear it all—all the shame and humiliation I have suffered to gain the ends of the Fatherland. Perhaps you will decide then that a princess of my house must not be further humbled by the gibes of the yellow American press."

And then, with intense bitterness, she told him the whole story, from Schlatter's entry with Marian to the finding of the note.

Von Heimer heard it without interruption. Then he asked:

"What kind of girl is this Nada? Fair, red-cheeked, very wholesome? What is her family name?"

"I don't know. She called herself Sturmer; falsely, of course."

"Not falsely! Von Sturmer! Nada von Sturmer! I thought there couldn't be two Nadas," cried Von Heimer, pacing the little deck like a caged tiger. "If you had killed her, *Fräulein,* or highness, if you had been heir to the throne, I'd—well, you didn't! Schlatter saved you, and saved her. Thank that one spark in him that survives; as I do.

"If she killed him it wasn't because he sought, lightly enough, probably a kiss. She is too sane for such melodrama and too strong to need it. She must have killed him to save Hadley and the girl, and perhaps herself and to keep Germany from the disgrace of their murder."

"Their murder! They were safe enough if they complied with our demands."

"If Hadley and Nicholson betrayed their country; an impossible conclusion! You would have murdered them if you had carried out your plans. Nada saved you from that."

"What is Nada to you?"

"But for this war she would have been my wife. We separated on the issue. Nada said it was a Hohenzollern-Hapsburg war, brought about to stun the German nations into retaining and glorifying their masters and their military yoke. She said they would make war like vermin, not like soldiers. And I have seen the great builder of our navy disgraced and heart-broken because he believed the navy he built and loved should make war like a great navy and not like a school of sharks."

"You are a revolutionist traitor, Von Heimer. That's why you want to disgrace me and dishonor the Fatherland."

"Your acts are your own, not mine. Like all the Hohenzollerns you hide from the shame of them behind the Fatherland. You are blind with fear and the lust for frightfulness or you would see that the murder of this girl now would be of no effect except to enrage America and the whole world. Hadley and Nada have escaped. All that she could tell, they can tell. I still believe that the Germany which backed the Hohenzollerns must stand behind them and pay the price afterward—and make them pay the price. If there is to be an accounting, let it be between Germany and the enemy, and Germany and her own. We may think of punishment, but not of betrayal. I am still true to the Hohenzollerns, though I am overfed on frightfulness, as is many another submarine commander.

"You must hide. If I am interned and, as I hope, no harm has come to anybody, I will plead my right in saving the girl's life to hush the matter up. If I get my boat back within the twenty-four hour limit I will pick you up and go back to Germany—to my execution, I suppose."

"You wrong me there, Herr Lieutenant," said Bertha wearily.

"Forgive me!"

"And what about me, Herr Lieutenant?" chirped Brunner. "I am one of the greatest surgeons in the world. You cannot leave me to rot in a Yankee prison. If

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you recover your elusive boat you will take me across, also, of course?"

Van Heimer looked down on the little coxcomb with unconcealed contempt.

"Yes," he replied; "for the purpose of shooting you through a torpedo tube in the middle of the ocean."

"Be quiet, Brunner," Bertha commanded. "You are always thinking of your miserable skin."

"It is miserably damp and cold, *Fräulein,*" Brunner retorted, "but it has been the subject of less concern here than has your own more august—"

"Fool! I am thinking of the Fatherland."

"So would I, *Fräulein,* if it were synonymous with—"

"I believe Von Heimer wouldn't consider it murder if I ordered you thrown overboard," she interrupted, with a return to that deadly calm authority which Nada's note had seemed to destroy.

Brunner had his doubts of that, also, and the testing of them didn't stir his sporting blood.

"I am too wet to be sensible, highness," he said apologetically.

The shore lights were now quite close. It was about four o'clock, and too early for a winter dawn, but the skies had cleared and the shore outline was easily visible. The wind had dropped and only a smooth ground-swell rolled solemnly forward to grumble itself out of existence in a thread-like line of tiny breakers.

"Shut off the engine now, Herr Lieutenant;" said Bertha. "We don't want to go too close to the shore. Otto can row us in from here in Brunner's boat. It has no tell-tale name on it. What are you going to do with the girl?"

"Take her wherever she wants to go, unless I'm picked up in the meantime. I suggest that you hide until you learn what becomes of me, *Fräulein.*"

"I don't know. I shall have to get some sleep before I do anything, but I must get these papers to Washington and a messenger to Mexico; and I'm tired of trusting fools. Otto will be on that point every night and Brunner or some other agent every day for three days. You will be able to find out my plans that way if you are at liberty. *Auf wiedersehen,* Herr Lieutenant!"

"*Auf wiedersehen,* highness! God protect you!"

"And the Fatherland!"

"And the Fatherland!"

He handed her down into the boat. She turned and held up her hand, and he pressed her fingers to his lips. Otto pushed off, and soon the boat was just a black blur on the gray water.

Von Heimer turned and surveyed the immovable form of Zimmer.

"I am wondering, Zimmer," he said, "which of us will seem least startling to a lady, under the present circumstances."

Zimmer contributed nothing. Von Heimer went on with his ruminations.

"She has never seen either of us before. It is 4 A.M. She is in bed. She almost has appendicitis. Either of us may frighten her into a complete and fatal attack of that malady. What do you think?"

Thus directly questioned, Zimmer grinned.

"I am a passable fellow, Herr Lieutenant," he suggested.

"Doubtless, your wife thinks so. The circumstance would tax a handsomer man, however; myself for instance. We had a woman on board, but she leaned toward homicide. I wish to heaven we had another."

"Why don't you look, stupid sea-soldier?"

Von Heimer whirled around. Standing in the doorway, one hand holding the door open, one shoulder against the doorpost, was a beautiful, smiling girl, dressed in the conventional black of a house-maid's costume.

Von Heimer was beside her in two swift strides.

"Nada! My Nada!" he cried.

"My dear, dear Rupert! My great, true, German man!"

Zimmer remembered something on the upper deck. When he got there he forgot what it was. He looked at the stars and the sea.

"War," he confided to them, "is not so bad after all—for the officers."

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"I'm afraid, Rupert," Nada was saying, "that I want to cry; only I haven't time."

"Where were you hiding? I am terribly angry. What madness have you been running into?"

She leaned back and looked up at him gravely. "Madness? From a U-boat commander?"

"Don't, Nada! We have obeyed orders."

"Mad orders! No wonder the cries of the helpless innocents are in your ears. My poor Rupert! Such loyalty is madness. But there are even worse things than that. Spies and assassins in the heart of a friendly nation! Innocent men and women, following the work that is their daily bread, are to be hurled into eternity—in bits. Some have already gone. The others we must prevent. An explosion in New Jersey; one in Pennsylvania; another in Bridgeport. Bridges are to be blown up; public buildings destroyed. Some of them, at any rate, we can prevent. Some I have already prevented by sending facts and documents to a newspaper! Rupert, you still believe that Germany should stand by the Hohenzollerns, and afterwards mete out her own punishment, when day by day they are spreading their crimes through the body of the whole world, friend or foe."

"You have been risking your life recklessly, Nada. You—"

"So have you; in a war for the Hohenzollerns. Mine has been in a war for Germany, and later for humanity."

"You are a woman."

"Our men have been too busy dying for the autocrats. The women have died more slowly—of starvation and broken hearts, and they have had time to think."

"I cannot think of anything just now but the narrowness of your escape. Where were you hiding?"

"I was with Miss Nicholson. I was in no danger, as it turned out. If she had found me there I had a rifle. I should have held her off and depended on your protection. We haven't time to talk about it, Rupert. Miss Nicholson is lying down now, but she is fully dressed. She wants to be taken to the house of a friend somewhere on the shore."

"Is she well enough to direct us?"

"We'll roll her up in rugs and put her in a deck-chair and steer from the upper deck. I think she'll be able to hold out. You had better come in and meet her."

As they turned to the door the sea suddenly heaved in violent commotion, slapping against the sides of the Stealaway and tossing her about. Von Heimer threw an arm about Nada to steady her until she had grasped the rail that ran around the cabin. Almost at once the swell subsided.

"The U-57," said Von Heimer, opening the cabin door and pushing Nada hurriedly inside. I'm glad to recover my command, but I wish they'd waited an hour or so. Keep out of sight."

From the port bow, nearest the mainland, came a hail, in English.

"Stealaway, ahoy! If you move we'll sink you. Who is in command?"

Before Von Heimer could get to the rail, from still further to port came another hail, cautious but clear, this time in German.

"Ahoy the U-57. Stand by to receive Her Highness the Princess Bertha von Schlessenfeldt."

Von Heimer found idiomatic English most fully expressive.

"Damnation," he muttered. "Now we'll have a hell of a time."

CHAPTER X.

ABOARD THE SUBMARINE.

THE discovery that the Ghost had vanished faced Hadley and Kuhn with the uncomfortable necessity of swimming a mile in their clothes through a heavy and confoundedly cold sea. Not only that, but they would then be far from any spot where effective help could be obtained.

Kuhn looked stolidly at Bert for orders. Bert looked across the mile of surly water. Then he looked at the submarine.

"They daren't go any nearer with this sea running," he reasoned. "Either the Stealaway or the U-boat will have to put a boat out. We'll wait here a few minutes and see what happens."

It was during the wait that the discovery of "what happened" brought to him an

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idea so brilliant it seemed almost an inspiration. Hurriedly he imparted it to Kuhn.

"Are you game?" he asked. "You can make for the shore if you like, and I'll pull it off alone."

"Death is certain in either event," returned Kuhn with phlegmatic pessimism, "and your method will at least be a warm one."

"It will," answered Bert cheerfully. "Come on!"

Five minutes later after a wide détour they scrambled up the further side of the partially submerged submarine, up the ladder and into the conning-tower. Bert, coming last, grasped the lever that closed and locked the heavy steel hatch, dropped to the platform, and pushed the electric signal that gave the order to submerge.

A lookout, swept off his feet by the combined force of surprise and the heavy body of Kuhn, sprang up and leveled his rifle, but Kuhn calmly waved it aside as if anticipating no hostilities.

"Call the under lieutenant," he ordered, beginning to pull off his wet clothes. "We are from the *Fräulein.*"

The under-lieutenant himself had sprung into the conning-tower to see why the boat was suddenly submerging. Kuhn saluted him, and as he returned the salute Hadley followed suit.

"We are from the *Fräulein,*" Kuhn repeated. "This is Herr Schlatter, the *Fräulein's* chief aid."

Hadley, praying that his German was really as good as was credited to him, looked up from the thought-preparing task of wiping the water from his eyes.

"Get us dry clothes," he requested. "The commander is trapped and the *Fräulein* captured. American officers are aboard the motor-boat. They will make the lieutenant signal you into a trap. We managed to slip over the side into the water."

"Have they guns?"

"There's a mosquito fleet all around us, ready to fire if the trap fails and we offer opposition. Have you a suit of clothes that will fit me, lieutenant?"

"The commander's will fit you better. Bring towels and a suit of the commander's clothes," he ordered a sailor. "Get an outfit of some kind for the man. What do you suggest, Herr Schlatter?"

They had gone down the ladder from the platform to the room below. The officer turned to a chart. Hadley looked over his shoulder.

"Our best chance," he replied, "is to get through to the ocean before daylight. To do that, we shall have to go down the East River—"

"I meant, Herr Schlatter, what do you suggest as the best means of rescuing the commander and the *Fräulein?* Not the best means of running away."

"The *Fräulein's* orders were that you should run for it."

"And leave my commander a prisoner on a silly river-launch! The order reaches only my deaf ear, *mein Herr.*"

"The *Fräulein's* orders were emphatic," returned Hadley, whose brilliant plan was to take the submarine intact into the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

"To hell with the *Fräulein's* orders!" snapped the under-lieutenant. "What does a woman know about a naval officer and his commander? They haven't any right to capture him unless we're at war, and if we're at war I'll sink every damned ship in the harbor and go down under the guns before I'll let him be disgraced by capture by a— *Ach!* To hell with the *Fräulein.* I'm in command."

Hadley was rubbing himself vigorously with a rough towel. He cast a glance of admiration at the young officer and tried diplomacy.

"You're a man after my own heart," he said with a friendly smile, "but the *Fräulein* is one who must be obeyed. You know who she is, I suppose."

"I do! We've obeyed and obeyed! We've sunk our seamen's pride, and have done things that have shamed us because they commanded. We wanted nothing better than to fight the British. There was glory! Fine seamen to fight and die with! A great and gallant enemy! We toasted 'The Day!' not in enmity, but as untried knights hoping to win honor from veterans. And what did they command us to do?

"Fight women and children and un-

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armed scows of merchantmen! My God, man, we've wept over the bitter shame of it, while the British have called us pirates and cowards. And now a *Fräulein* commands an officer and a gentleman to leave his commander a prisoner on a damned toy river-launch without striking a blow. You've heard the American phrase, my friend—nothing doing!"

"What do you propose? You can't sink the boat. A torpedo would blow her to bits, and the commander and the *Fräulein* with her."

"Why do they capture him? We have a right to stay twenty-four hours in United States waters. Are we at war?"

"No; but you probably know something of the mission he came on. He brought documents to the *Fräulein*."

"Well? We are not at war with the United States. Surely we may bring documents for our ambassador."

"I think these particular documents are somewhat too frankly anticipating that state to be considered entirely friendly."

"Ah! In that case the commander may be shot as a spy."

The lieutenant was young, and perhaps hadn't given as much time to the study of international usage as he should. He came to very broad conclusions with something of impetuosity.

"Oh, no," Hadley assured him. "He will be imprisoned; nothing more."

"Pardon me!" returned the officer with finality. "I know what would happen to an American officer captured with such documents in German waters. If he prayed, it would have to be rapidly."

He was looking at the periscope-table as he spoke.

"A speck that looks like a rowboat, carrying a violet light, approaching the launch! What will that be?"

"That will be Brunner," answered Hadley. "He's going into the trap."

"Who's Brunner? Fussy little man with escaping eyes and Wilhelm mustache, whose first care is to tell you he's one of the greatest surgeons in the world? Let him go into it. I hope they'll hang him. We saw him the last time we were here. Heimer would forfeit three grades to fire him through a torpedo-tube. Bah! Must have missed the stern by millimeters, getting to leeward. Here, Schroeder! Take these clothes and spread them out to dry in the engine-room. What's this?"

The insignia on a small card that had fallen from Bert's vest-pocket caught his eye. It was Bert's leave card. He had slipped it in there in his haste, instead of into his pocketbook, and had emptied his pockets of everything else, including the handcuffs and key.

The card was blurred and sodden, but the naval ensign and the words "Atlantic Fleet, Brooklyn Navy Yard Station," stood out above the blotched writing.

"Took it from Hadley, commander," said Bert casually, reaching for the card. "You've heard of him? Gunnery expert! We captured him before they sprang their trap. It may be useful yet. Better not destroy it."

"I won't," said the officer, scrutinizing it thoughtfully. He looked at Bert, back to the card, and again at Bert.

"You have the eyes of a seaman, and the skin of a seaman, and you wear that uniform like an officer. By God! You are Hadley!"

His hand flew to his pocket, but Bert had anticipated the move, and had already thanked the German preparedness that left a spare pistol in the spare suit. His hand was first in and first out, and his pistol covered the heart of the gallant young officer.

"Keep still!" he commanded. "Get back there. If a man moves, I'll shoot the officer dead."

"Get rifles and shoot him down," ordered the lieutenant. "Never mind me."

"Oh, yes!" laughed Bert, "an explosion in here would be nice, wouldn't it?"

"You haven't a chance in a million, Hadley. Surrender!"

"If you'll put me and my man ashore at the navy yard and intern!"

"You have very American ideas of a surrender. I'll let you leave the way you came."

"Too humiliating! Also too uncomfortable!"

Bert had stepped back, intending to make a leap for the ladder leading to the

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platform. He had seen a machine-gun there, and if he could reach it, by threatening to riddle the submarine from the inside, not to mention the possibility of blowing it inside out by the explosions, he would have at least a bob-tail flush to bluff his "American surrender" on.

Kuhn, less fortunate in the gifts of German preparedness, was standing stolidly near by, his glinting, watchful eyes contradicting the apparent indifference of his attitude. As far as their own lives were concerned, the sailors would undoubtedly have rushed Bert without hesitation, but the life of their officer was, under the circumstances, something not to be risked recklessly.

Bert had almost reached the ladder and was putting his hand out to grasp it.

"Look out!" suddenly yelled Kuhn, but he had seen and given the warning a fraction of a second too late.

A burly, clawing figure dropped from above onto Hadley's back, sending the pistol flying with the first whirling onslaught. Hadley went to his knees. Kuhn leaped in the same instant and seized one leg of the assailant. The sea-boot came off in his hand, so with ready presence of mind Kuhn flung it in the face of the foremost rushing sailor.

Instantly Bert seized the stockinged foot and applied the toe-hold with desperate vigor, and as the sailor released his grasp with a squeal of agony he lurched to his feet in time to land a wild sting to the stomach of a man who was just about to end Kuhn's earthly career with a clubbed rifle. Then he was the whirling center of an avalanche of men, among them the impetuous sub-lieutenant.

As a fight, it was too confused to be pretty, but as effort against odds it was epic.

As Kuhn went down under a sledge-hammer smash from the officer, Bert found opportunity for a swift hook which landed with precision in the officer's left eye. Twice he grasped the ladder, only to be compelled to relinquish his hold to make another savage assault.

The second time the lieutenant, with a flying leap from behind, managed to wind his arms about him, and, still fighting, he was borne down by weight of numbers. One apostle of preparedness had been waiting conservatively for this moment, and he immediately slipped a noose around Hadley's ankles and tightened it with a vicious jerk. In another minute the fight was definitely over.

"It would have been much easier to surrender, Hadley," remarked the lieutenant, holding a handkerchief to his bruised eye.

"Easier!" panted Hadley. "I wouldn't have missed that scrap for a month's pay. How's poor Kuhn? Not killed, I hope."

"Oh no! I'd just put him out of harm's reach with a nice uppercut when you landed a nasty hook to my eye," grumbled the lieutenant in the tone of one whose kindness has not been appreciated. "Do you enjoy that kind of scrambling fighting?"

"Oh, I'd prefer more room and shorter odds," Bert returned, "but a scrap's a scrap. What are you going to do with us?"

"I'm going to try to get some information from you, first of all. We shall have to settle what's to become of you later."

"Afraid you'll have a nasty, black eye to-morrow. What's your name, by the bye?"

"Dusendorf; Ernest Dusendorf. I'm afraid I may have to kill you, Hadley."

"Don't be so wretchedly pessimistic. The only solution you Germans seem to have for all the problems of life is to kill somebody. No wonder you're unpopular. People don't like that sort of thing."

"Why did you come on board this boat?"

"Well, it wasn't as far to swim as it would have been to swim to the shore, and the water was miserably cold and our clothes heavy. Then again, the *Fräulein* has been conducting another of her famous offensives. She has captured a woman, and she threatens to kill her unless her father turns traitor to his country and gives up certain information he happens to have. On a deserted spot in Long Island I could be of little help to her. You must be very proud of your diplomatic offensives, Dusendorf."

Except for a gesture of impatience, Dusendorf ignored the thrust. He was watching the periscope-table.

"How did you expect to help her here?"

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"I expected to persuade you to move down the Sound. I thought I might either surprise you into surrendering to a destroyer or get you into the navy-yard."

"Huh! Who is the woman?"

"I don't think I'll tell you that."

"The story about the commander and the *Fräulein* being captured, then, was—strategy."

Hadley laughed. "You can test it, Herr Lieutenant, by approaching the motor-boat on the surface," he suggested.

"I suppose so," agreed the lieutenant dryly. "She's moving toward the mainland. We'll try to test it by following her—submerged. What's her name?"

"The Stealaway. I wish you'd order these ropes taken off. This is no way to treat an officer."

"Just now, my friend," returned the lieutenant grimly, "you're not an officer. You're a spy."

"Have them put handcuffs on me instead of ropes, then. These things cut like the devil."

"Anything to oblige you in reason, Hadley. We have some very fine ones. Made in America. Schroeder, attend to the Herr Commander's comfort. He prefers handcuffs."

Somewhere motors were humming softly, and the fingers of indicators in front of the lieutenant were swinging lazily to and fro. Otherwise only an experienced seaman would have detected the stealthy forward motion of the deadly mechanical miracle, trailing speculatively the boat that might be friend or prey.

Schroeder, less fearful of the prisoner's chances of an offensive than the *Fräulein* had been, manacled only his wrists, and in front of him. This done, Hadley stretched himself out on a bench, and in two minutes was fast asleep.

Dusendorf, watching the periscope-table, suddenly gave the signal to stop.

"She's swung her head east again and stopped," he observed. "Something taking place to port, but I can't see what it is. Somebody putting off in a boat, I think. Swing around her and get across her bows. We'll have a closer look."

He took the hand-steering wheel himself and the submarine glided gently forward, far enough off to keep the wake of the periscope from being seen from the Steelaway. The motor-boat became only a black shadow on the reflector, brought out by the tiny dots of her lights. Cautiously Dusendorf crept nearer.

"Rowboat putting off! Three men and one woman in her. All are too small for the commander or Zimmer, except the man who's rowing, and he's too large. By Heaven, I'm going up to find out what's happened, and if Von Heimer isn't all right there's going to be an explosion around here. Send her up."

He sprang up the ladder to the platform of the conning-tower as the boat heaved upward on an even keel. Hadley was awakened by the rush of fresh, cold air and the hail.

"Stealaway, ahoy! If you move we'll sink you. Who is in command?"

And before it could be answered came the indistinguishable sound of another hail. Down into the boat Duseldorf shouted.

"Stand by to pick up the rowboat. The Princess Bertha von Schlessenfeldt is aboard. Mount guard below. Squad of four up and bear a hand. Then he added to himself: Why in thunder couldn't she go ashore? This is no place for a woman. Stealaway, ahoy!"

"Ahoy, Dusendorf!"

"Ahoy, *mein* commander! Are you safe?"

"Yes. Stand by for a gangplank. I have a woman passenger."

"*Ach!*" muttered Dusendorf. "Shall we pick up the Princess Bertha first, Herr Lieutenant?"

"Yes. They're almost alongside."

Bertha, listening, clenched her royal hands and wondered if the question would have been asked two years ago and answered without surprise and in qualified terms.

Suddenly she felt that the terrible armed power that the Hohenzollern had created was a mighty Frankenstein monster, infinitely more powerful than its masters if it should turn on them.

She pulled herself together. The Hohenzollerns had ever been bold and imperious

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and had won against all odds by their superb courage and overmastering wills.

The three men remained in the boat and Otto pulled off toward land once more. Bertha crossed the deck and through an opened door in the conning-tower to the platform and acknowledged the under-lieutenant's salute.

"Do you need lessons in precedence, Herr Lieutenant?" she asked coldly. "A Prussian princess does not wait in a wet rowboat until a subofficer has received attention."

"I am not in command, highness," returned Dusendorf, "especially on an occasion of such high honor."

"You are in danger, Herr Bright Wit, of never being in command."

"Have I your highness's permission to give an order? My commander waits."

"Let him wait. Lower the platform. I am cold."

Dusendorf leaned over the rail and called down: "Ease alongside the Stealaway for a gangplank." Then, to one of the guard: "Lower away the platform, man. Didn't you hear her highness's orders?"

A moment later Bertha found herself confronting a somewhat battered-looking man in the uniform of an over-lieutenant of the German Navy. The face had a familiar look, and so had the handcuffs, but both the uniform and the situation were surprising.

"I arrived before you, *Fräulein*," said Hadley cheerfully.

"You are ubiquitous, Herr Commander," returned the *Fräulein*. "I thought you had gone away in the Ghost?"

"I intended to, but somebody had thought of it first—Miss Nicholson's chauffeur, I think. He must almost be due to return for her. Pray, sit down, *Fräulein*. You look terribly tired."

"Not yet! There is something to be done. Where is Nada?"

"Nada? Ah! The girl who was nursing Miss Nicholson at your house? I haven't seen her, *Fräulein*."

"An American officer and a liar," said Bertha. "I have no time for you just now, but I'll settle with you when I have dealt with less excusable insubordination."

The platform was descending. Von Heimer, supporting Marian, stepped from it. He saluted the *Fräulein* and stared in amazement at the disheveled figure in his own uniform hurrying anxiously forward to the girl's side.

"How do, Von Heimer!" said the apparition in English. "Order these irons taken off me, old fellow. I haven't minded them until this minute. How are you feeling, Marian. Lead her to the bench, old man."

"Hadley, by all the gods!" exclaimed Von Heimer. What have you been up to? Here, somebody! Who handcuffed Commander Hadley? The key! Take them off at once. Herr Dusendorf, this is an act of war."

"That's all right, Von Heimer. I was a bit rough with them. Look at Dusendorf's eye."

"Leave the irons on and add leg irons," came a cool, commanding voice.

"I command here, highness," retorted Von Heimer angrily. "Commander Hadley is a friend of mine. I am willing to commit an act of war under orders, by detaining him, but he shall not be humiliated, and you must take the responsibility for the act of war. On reflection I shall release him rather than subject my boat to capture as an enemy."

"You are mistaken, Herr Lieutenant. You are no longer in command. Dusendorf, you are promoted to the command. Submerge the boat and place Von Heimer under arrest. Here is my commission as admiral from His Majesty the Emperor, placing all vessels in American waters under my control."

Dusendorf looked at his commander and at the princess, who held out her commission for him to examine. Suddenly he drew himself up and saluted, and if his words seemed light the pallor of his cheeks told of his perception of their deadly danger to him.

"Your highness is the most beautiful admiral I have ever seen," he said. "German fighting men have been commanded to kill women, but they have no precedent for obeying them. Doubtless we shall come to that for our sins."

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"Do you defy the Kaiser, madman?"

"I am on active service, highness. I obey my commander to the death. Your orders, Herr Lieutenant?"

"Proceed slowly on the surface in the direction we are headed. Commander Hadley will show us where Miss Nicholson and he desire to be put ashore. I think the place is called Three Oaks Bluff."

The petty officers and men of the submarine had stood near, unostentatiously drinking in the scene between their officers and the princess. She turned to them and was about to speak when the boom of a gun roared out its message of warning.

"Three-inch blank," remarked Hadley, springing to his feet. "And nobody has taken these irons off yet."

Through the hatch of the conning-tower came the white reflection of a search-light.

"Ahoy, the submarine," came a mighty hail. "What boat is that?"

Von Heimer and Dusendorf leaped up the ladder. Hadley followed as best he could.

"The U-57 of the Imperial German Navy," Von Heimer shouted.

"What are you doing in these waters?"

"On our way through. Expect to put out to sea before noon. What boat is that?"

"Destroyer Smithson of the United States Navy. Our orders are to detain you for inspection. You will precede us, on the surface, to the Brooklyn Navy Yard. If you attempt to submerge we shall sink you."

"Ahoy, Magee," shouted Bert. "This is Hadley. Put a boat off for me and Miss Nicholson, will you? We want to get under the Stars and Stripes."

"That you, Hadley? All well?"

"Yes! Radio Mr. Nicholson at the White House and put—"

Suddenly the platform began to descend, the trap door dropped into place and the boat started to submerge.

"Who—" roared Von Heimer, and stopped. Bertha was looking at him with calm eyes full of menace.

"The men have elected to obey the orders of the high command, Herr Lieutenant. The Hohenzollerns cannot be defied by their own subordinate officers."

"The Smithson will drop a shot into us," Von Heimer warned her.

"Not at all, since Herr Hadley was so thoughtful as to tell them of the valuable hostages we hold aboard. You are under arrest."

"Not yet!" snapped Von Heimer. He sprang to the quick-firer and swung it around until it covered his mutinous crew. "I command here still. Take your posts."

"The beginning of the end," thought Hadley. "The clay feet of the god discipline. Too much Hohenzollern!"

CHAPTER XI.

FANATICS OF KULTUR.

ONE thing in the *Fräulein's* calculations seemed to have been accurately forecast, at any rate. No shot came from the Smithson. A six-inch shell is no respecter of persons, and a submerging submarine is given a highly adequate impetus toward the bottom when it entertains one *en passant*.

Still, a three-inch fired on the inside has one great advantage over a six-inch shell fired from the outside: It is absolutely certain of a hit.

Von Heimer laughed grimly over the impression he had made. The men cowered weakly in a group, terror in their pleading eyes and white faces.

No discipline had ever prepared them for this unique danger. The face of Von Heimer himself was deathly white, but hard and set as marble. It was cruelly plain that he was not bluffing.

Bert glanced at Marian. She was sitting up on the bench, her eyes glittering with admiration, her lips smiling, looking for all the world like an enthusiastic spectator of an exciting race. Her sporting courage simply stabbed him afresh with desperate terror.

"To your posts!" ordered Von Heimer.

"Stand still!" commanded Bertha. "He is not insane enough to commit suicide."

"I'll commit suicide before I'll give up my boat to a tyrannical woman," he assured them. "And I'll take everybody with me. Get to your posts."

The men shuffled aimlessly, as if not one

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was certain of what his post was, or how to get there.

"The first man who moves," said the *Fräulein,* "is a traitor to the Fatherland, and will be treated as such. The madman will not shoot."

"You and your kind invented frightfulness and forced honest seamen to learn it," Von Heimer retorted. "You are going to have an ample taste of it in just sixty seconds. Get back, Hadley. I'll command my own boat to the end."

"Listen, Von Heimer," Hadley pleaded. "You can't murder Miss Nicholson like that."

"There are her murderers. I'll execute them simultaneously with their own crime."

"You're a coward! By God, you're not a seaman! You're a coward; produced and damned by frightfulness!"

"Hadley!"

"For the sake of your own vanity, you threaten this dastardly act. You haven't the courage to face things with a man's nerve, confident in your own strength to remedy them or bear them like a man. You must plunge the innocent and helpless to a cruel doom because your vanity shudders at less than extinction for yourself. My old friend of Berlin has become a mere animal of frightfulness."

"I was to be arrested and disgraced because I protected you and Miss Nicholson, Hadley. This is one last protest against—"

"It's mad and futile, Von Heimer. Don't ruin what you've done and your future usefulness to Germany by such a crime. Germany will need such men as you. There's room for compromise."

"I will not compromise with rebellion," snapped Bertha.

Hadley whirled on her and snapped in turn:

"Are you the Kaiser, that you speak of rebellion."

"I represent him here," she retorted.

"And I represent the United States navy, in whose jurisdiction you are. You will have nothing to say in the matter. It is the men who will compromise. I think you'll agree to it, too, rather than be a sharer in this senseless slaughter."

"What do you propose, Herr Hadley?" Bertha asked.

"Bert," put in Marian, "let Mr. von Heimer enforce discipline. I can enjoy the strain longer than the mutineers can."

"Be quiet, Madcap. This is not a game. *Fräulein,* I propose that you withdraw your order, leaving the officers in command of the vessel, and that you promise to overlook permanently what you consider their insubordination, on condition that Herr von Heimer shall undertake to attempt to get the boat into the ocean. We have as yet no submarine-nets guarding the harbor. This does not pledge the lieutenant to obey any orders to harm Miss Nicholson or myself, nor to anything other than your personal safety from capture while you are on the boat. Men, I submit that that is a fair proposal."

"Is there no trap attached to it, Herr Hadley?"

"On my honor as an American officer!"

"Then I agree," said Bertha, with the skill of a general who tries craftily to hold demoralized troops by ordering them to do what they will otherwise do mutinously.

"Order the handcuffs off Herr Hadley," demanded Von Heimer, "and give your word to attempt no personal harm to the prisoners while they are on my boat."

"I give it. Remove the handcuffs from Herr Hadley."

"Furthermore, I will attack no ship in the Sound or the harbor except in defense. I refuse to be responsible for bringing the United States into the war against the Fatherland, beyond offering no active resistance to this illegal kidnaping."

"Very well! You have more terms than Bismarck."

"I have more scruples. Germany has had too few since the Hohenzollerns went to school to Bismarck."

"Remember, Herr Lieutenant, that you are a subject of the Hohenzollerns."

"Of all of them! We are constantly reminded of it. If the Kaiser remembered more frequently that he is the Emperor of Germany, and less frequently that the Germans are his subjects, the yoke might be lighter. To your posts, men."

Von Heimer glanced at indicators and

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made a careful study of a chart. Then he looked at a tide table and consulted his watch.

"Twenty feet lower!" he ordered. "Half speed!"

"I appeal for medical attention and a bed for Miss Nicholson, Von Heimer," said Bert, when the submarine commander had finished his calculations.

"Life is just one medical attention and bed after another," grumbled Marian. "I've had more sleep than anybody here, and much more medical attention. Can't I sit up for any of the fun. I've never been in a submarine before."

"You've never gone to bed in a submarine before, Madcap," laughed Hadley. "I hope you'll have the experience very soon."

"Prepare my quarters for the Fräulein Nicholson," Von Heimer ordered, "and ask the surgeon to see that she is comfortable. Her highness will occupy Herr Dusendorf's quarters."

"Miss Nicholson will need help," put in Bertha. "I will attend her."

"Your attentions have been somewhat disquieting so far, *Fräulein,*" Hadley objected.

Bertha's face softened with regret and expostulation.

"You don't understand, Herr Hadley," she began earnestly but gently.

"But I do, Bertha," Marian interrupted. "You'd kill me without remorse if it would seem to serve your Fatherland, but you just ache to baby me like a big sister when it's just a matter of you and me. The Fatherland is like King Charles's head, which would insist on intruding itself into a very celebrated document originally devoted, I believe, to cabbages."

Bertha laughed and kissed the upturned cheek of the plucky girl very tenderly.

"I think I know 'David Copperfield' rather better than you do, dear. It wasn't cabbages; but I'm sure I can keep King Charles's head out of it until after you're put to bed, anyhow. I am sure you can trust me."

"I've probably got it mixed with 'Cabbages and Kings.' They have a similar tendency to get their heads cut off. At any rate, I'm sure you're quite lovely, Bertha, when you keep the Fatherland out of the document."

"It is written by a higher hand than mine, dear. Let's go and take a look at our interesting quarters. I am almost dead for sleep. Call me when we pass Sandy Hook, or in case of anything unusual, lieutenant."

Von Heimer saluted stiffly.

"And call me at the slightest sign of excitement, lieutenant," Marian begged.

Von Heimer saluted again, smiling.

"I should invent an excuse immediately but for my fear of Hadley, Miss Madcap," he ventured. "I fear you will find him a great tyrant as a husband."

Hadley smiled. Marian gave him a look of reproof.

"Having ordered me to bed, it might become you to try to get some sleep yourself—tyrant," she said. "You may first support me to my quarters. When my father releases me I shall tell him how you bullied me—and saved my life," she finished in a whisper, "from lunatics of Kultur."

CHAPTER XII.

TO CIRCUMVENT THE HOHENZOLLERNS.

IN spite of Nada's pleas, Von Heimer had steadily refused to take her aboard the submarine.

"I can protect Miss Nicholson," he said. "I shall take her aboard and carry her to the home of her friends, where she wishes to go. I know the men are loyal enough to me to do that, in spite of the princess. In fact, by taking her I can unite the men more strongly behind me if the princess tries to make trouble, as she will. But I couldn't possibly protect you. Whatever your motives, you have undoubtedly been doing things that Germans, at the present time, are in no mood to consider as patriotism.

"Her highness doesn't know you are on board this boat. You had better stay on it. I shall leave the engine running, so when we have gone you can head for the shore or wait to be picked up. If I take

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you aboard the submarine, now that the *Fräulein's* there, I am signing your death-warrant."

"I can persuade them," Nada pleaded. "It would be a wonderful thing to win over an entire submarine crew to the cause of liberty and sanity."

"You might as well try to convert the torpedoes. You will stay on board this boat, Nada."

She was peering through a window in the darkened cabin.

"Certainly!" she agreed readily and unexpectedly. "I see Bertha is going aboard the submarine alone. The men are putting back. Brunner is going to carry out the commission Schlatter resigned so suddenly. He is what I want."

"What do you want him for?"

"I want something that you have come three thousand miles to bring. If it's what I think it is, it's enough to carry the necessary amount of conviction I need to a certain idealist."

"Nada, I'm afraid I'm neglecting my duty in not arresting you. I'm afraid you're a traitor to Germany."

She stamped her foot impatiently.

"Here is an excellent excuse for you," she snapped. "If you make a move toward me I'll kill you."

In her hand an automatic pistol covered Von Heimer's heart.

"I am not a traitor to Germany," she went on; "I am a rebel against frightfulness and against the insane insolence that dares to brand it upon a great nation's soul, while ordering it to endure torments of the body to preserve the rights of insolence to be insolent. If you think that's treason, try to arrest me."

"*Auf wiedersehen,* my Nada; God be with you."

"And with you, my Rupert! And with the Fatherland."

"And with the Fatherland."

"*Auf wiedersehen!* Take good care of my dear patient, Rupert! Good-by, dear Miss Nicholson."

"Good-by, dear Nada! You'll come to see me, soon, won't you?"

"What is it you say in America. You bet!"

"'You betcher!' is more common. Good luck!"

"Good luck!"

Von Heimer had pushed the gangplank out. He came back for Marian. In a moment they had gone.

Nada pushed the lever that let in the clutch, and started the boat at once. Suddenly a huge and threatening shape seemed to bulge from the surface of the sea, and a cannon sent its uncompromising roar and flash through the still atmosphere.

They had been so engrossed by the U-boat on the port bow that they had not seen this stronger engine of war come creeping up through the darkness.

Nada heard the hail and the reply and kept her course. She did not wish to be interrupted in her chase by a United States war-ship, whose commander would doubtless be ignorant of her mission and standing.

But from the side of the black bulk shot a smaller shadow, silent as a ghost, and swift as a swallow—one of Mr. Nicholson's newly perfected electric submarine hunters. It slid toward the Stealaway and overtook her with one phantomlike glide.

Seeing that it was useless to attempt flight, Nada shot the clutch out and brought the boat to a stop. In little more than another second a trim young lieutenant came aboard. Nada was standing on the stern deck.

"Who's in command of this boat?" he asked.

"I am," Nada answered, "and you're delaying work of the utmost importance."

"I'm glad to hear that. We are beginning to distrust German work of importance. Who else is on board?"

"Nobody!"

"Search the boat! Miss Nicholson and Commander Hadley are reported to be on board."

"They're not! I wish they were. Miss Nicholson just went aboard the submarine. I helped Commander Hadley to escape a while ago. Wasn't it he I heard answering the submarine hail a moment ago? Either they've captured him again or he has tried to capture them and failed."

"Who are you?"

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"I am Nada. If you've never heard of me it's no use trying to explain. I'm trying to get to shore to follow a man who has just gone there, carrying important documents which must fall into the hands of the United States government. You must let me go at once, lieutenant."

"I suppose so," laughed the lieutenant. "You're German, aren't you?"

"Yes, of the party of freedom and sanity; opposing the party of autocracy and frightfulness. I have saved Miss Nicholson's life once to-night. You will be surprised to learn that the commander of the U-boat has also saved it; at greater risk and more recently."

"A very beautiful story, *Fräulein*. I believe it, but it sounds so interesting that I must ask you to repeat it, with more detail, to the captain."

"For Heaven's sake don't delay me. I must make for the shore. This is of the utmost importance."

"You must come with us to the Smithson. Perhaps the captain can identify you."

"And then it will be too late. For Heaven's sake cut a little red tape and act with intelligence. These people are not going to hang around forever with such documents in their possession."

"What are the documents, *Fräulein?*"

"I don't know. I only suspect."

"What do you suspect?"

"Something which cannot be confided to a young naval lieutenant, even in America."

"Then the young naval lieutenant will have no authority other than to take you before his captain. Kindly step aboard the launch, *Fräulein*."

There was no help for it. Nada took the hand of a seaman and sprang into the launch, while the lieutenant continued his search of the Stealaway. In a moment or two he was once more in the launch. There was a soft, droning murmur, a ripple, and a thin white line behind, and the little boat had flashed to the side of her mother ship.

Captain Magee was in a furious temper.

"Of all the infernal nerve!" he roared. "He just calmly submerged right under my very nose, knowing that I can't fire on him. Right under my very nose."

It would perhaps have required more nerve to submerge under that evidently sensitive organ had the submarine commander known that Captain Magee could fire on him, but nobody dared to offer this as a theory. The lieutenant saluted.

"The motorboat is the Stealaway, sir. I apprehended one woman, German, who was alone on her."

"Send out three launches, Mr. Tynan, to locate her periscope," called the captain to the first lieutenant, not meaning the "one woman, German," of course. "What was she doing?" This time he meant the "one woman, German."

"Making for shore, sir. She claims to be working against the German government, and that she was pursuing a man who carries papers inimical to the government of the United States."

"I'll come and see her. Mr. Tynan, take charge, please. Under no circumstances must the submarine be fired upon. Wireless the circumstances to the forts. Why the devil haven't we got submarine nets?"

Nada, guarded by marines, met him with a military salute.

"Who are you, madam?" he demanded, as he acknowledged it.

"Have you heard of Nada?"

"Name sounds familiar. Bring those men we picked up in that freak motorboat."

A marine saluted and went off. In a moment he returned with Tim and the mechanician of the Ghost.

"Do you know this woman?" the captain asked. Tim was preparing to say "No," when the German forestalled him, first with a salute to Nada, then with:

"This is the great Fräulein Nada, captain. I have told you that I was in the service of the messenger of free Germany. The *Fräulein* is the messenger, sir. Soon she will be the ambassador."

"What is your name, *Fräulein?*"

"Nada von Sturmer, captain. Your lieutenant was so restricted in his authority that valuable evidence of the intrigue of the German government against yours is in danger of being lost to us, and in that case the intrigue may have some success. I must

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ask you to send me about as far down as New Rochelle on one of your wonderful launches without a moment's delay."

"Can you tell me the nature of the documents, *Fräulein*, and the evidence you have for suspecting their existence?"

Nada stepped forward, linked her arm in that of the captain, and led him aside. She spoke quietly to him for a minute or two. Then the captain turned to the lieutenant who had searched the boat.

"Mr. Whiteley, detail a launch in charge of an ensign to put the *Fräulein* ashore at New Rochelle in fast time. Not a word of her statement must be allowed to get out. Caution your marines. I have no authority to advance you ship's money, *Fräulein*, but my own funds are at your disposal. Find the smallest great coat and cap on the ship, Mr. Ganz, and bring them to my quarters. Any report from the launches?"

The ensign addressed saluted. "Periscope sighted momentarily, sir, by No. 4, in my charge. Submarine apparently headed east."

"Report to Mr. Tynan and return to your boat. Carry a red marker, and request Mr. Tynan to make a course following you. If you sight her again, signal and remain in pursuit."

Five minutes later, Nada, clad in a bugler's great coat and cap, lay cuddled up in the stern of the electric launch, covered with ship's blankets, fast asleep, while the boat slid like a ghost over the water to New Rochelle. Adolph, the mechanician, was crouched at her feet. Tim had asked to remain with what he fondly believed to be the pursuit of the boat on which his mistress and Commander Hadley were prisoners.

At Echo Bay the tide was low. The ensign eased the boat close to the rocks, flanking the bathing beach of Hudson Park, and Adolph scrambled out. It had already been arranged that he should fetch a taxicab, and that Nada should be allowed to sleep in the boat until he returned.

Nada's choice of New Rochelle was not a haphazard one. Indeed, nothing that that capable little person did was haphazard. In the present case it was based on a fairly good understanding of the limit of Dr. Brunner's endurance, and an excellent familiarity with the locations of Bertha's aides.

She knew that Brunner was not fool enough to stay in the neighborhood of his landing-place, after the advent of the destroyer; and she also knew that very soon Brunner must sleep. That he would attempt to sleep in one of the road-houses, or any other place easily accessible to official inquiry, was not to be considered.

Knowing that the nearest German spy-agent was in New Rochelle, Nada had a fairly shrewd idea of where Brunner would be found, or would soon arrive, New Rochelle being less likely to be watched than the entrance to New York. It was nearly half an hour before Adolph returned.

"I have telephoned to Mr. Smith, *Fräulein*, that you are coming up," he reported. "I said, for the benefit of the men in the garage, that you had run over from Sea Cliff as soon as you heard that your mother was sick, and that your brother, Dr. Brunner, was expected to arrive from Bridgeport at any moment, but would probably stay at the house across the way. He replied that he would watch the house across the way."

"You have done excellently, Adolph. I hope Brunner will have sense enough to get some sleep. I need a lot more myself. I wish I could keep on sleeping here now; but even Brunner's imagination may find something unaccountable for him to do."

She threw the blankets aside reluctantly, thanked the officer, and scrambled over the rocks with Adolph. The house they were bound for was in a big residence park far up North Avenue. The dawn was tinging the wintry sky with gray as they reached it. Mr. "Smith" met them at the door.

"He arrived five minutes ago, *Fräulein*," he reported. "*Mein frau* is preparing food for you."

Nada considered a moment.

"I need advice even more than food, *mein Herr*," she said. "Adolph, watch the house from that window. Come Herr Schmidt, we will talk in your study. I am in a quandary."

Rapidly she told the big German-American all that had taken place, including the escape of the submarine.

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"Now, the problem is this," she wound up. "I am fairly confident that Brunner was given the papers and ordered to take them to Washington. There's just a chance the *Fräulein* kept them herself, but because of her uncertainty about Von Heimer and a suspicion of pursuit through the supposed escape of Commander Hadley, she probably turned the papers over to Brunner and ordered him to get them through to Washington. We suspect strongly, then, that Brunner has them; but we can't search the house without a warrant, and if we get one the papers can easily be destroyed. We have to come on them suddenly.

"Again, if we track Brunner for the purpose of surprising him with the papers, we may fail. He may leave them with Wilstach, whom we know to be a Hohenzollern agent, with orders to send them to Washington by some other means—perhaps through the mail, though they probably wouldn't risk that, because the U. S. Post Office Department is not sleeping. What do you think, Herr Schmidt?"

"I am for having the United States secret service men surround the house and make a search."

"The papers will be destroyed."

"I must look at it as an American citizen, *Fräulein*. If the papers are destroyed the plot against my country will fall through."

"Nonsense, Herr Schmidt! There are messengers. Besides, the papers can be duplicated. It is only by exposing the plot and publishing the documents that the plot can be proved and its possibility destroyed."

"What do you believe the plot is, *Fräulein*."

"I believe it is an offer of certain guarantees to Mexico and Japan in return for war by them upon the United States if this country resents actively the Hohenzollern policy. If we can secure the documents the State Department will be thoroughly fortified against it."

"The problem, then, is to be certain of their whereabouts all the time until we can secure them."

"Exactly! Wait! You've given me an idea. Let me think."

She thought aloud.

"Brunner doesn't know me very well. He only saw me once, and then only glanced at me, when I was playing nurse to Miss Nicholson. I don't think he knows Louise, the other maid, at all. He usually saw only the men at the house. Bertha can't have had time to make detailed plans before suddenly changing to the submarine. Give me your telephone, Herr Schmidt. What is Wilstach's number? He still has the sea-going launch, hasn't he?"

"Yes! The telephone number is 6742. Mrs. Smith has just signaled that the food is ready. She likes to be called Mrs. Smith."

"Quite proper, as a good American," smiled Nada. "Ask Mrs. Smith to wait just a minute. This will take nerve, my good Johann Schmidt, John Smith, but when you come to think of it, many things do."

She gave the telephone number and a moment later asked for Dr. Brunner.

"Wrong number!" came the response.

"This is number twenty-seven, is it not?" inquired Nada.

"Who are you?" demanded the voice at the other end with sudden interest.

"One who has no number," replied Nada coldly, in German. "The one ahead of number one. Tell him to come and speak to me at once."

"Yes, *Fräulein!* A thousand pardons. I will call him at once."

In a moment came Brunner's voice. Nada knew at once that her little passage with twenty-seven had been of invaluable psychological effect in that it had prepared Brunner completely to believe that he was to speak with the *Fräulein*.

"I am here, *Fräulein*," he began. "Did you leave the submarine so quickly?"

Nada spoke hurriedly and in a low tone, as though guardedly.

"Only for a time. We avoided the destroyer. You know the rendezvous of the U-59? Meet me in those waters. Take Wilstach's sea-going boat. Bring the papers with you. My maid, Louise, will be out there in an hour with a trunk with things for me. Bring her. After she arrives, start at once. Send Wilstach to make the boat ready. We have Hadley and the girl and Nada prisoners. If you reach the U-59

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before we do, send Louise aboard her with the papers, and you go back to New York in the Sea Nymph. You know the signals for the submarine?"

"Yes, *Fräulein.*"

"You can get some sleep in the boat."

"Yes, *Fräulein.* What has happened to Von Heimer?"

"He is at the bottom of the sea, where all traitors go, *mein Herr.* Be faithful!"

Nada hung up the receiver and turned to Mr. Smith with a smile.

"I believe he really is at the bottom of the sea," she said. "Von Heimer, I mean, but I think he's entirely surrounded by U-boat. I think he will be a match for a Hohenzollern. And now let us have some food and another half-hour of sleep. Then I shall want some clothes for myself, an unmarked trunk, and your closed car, that I may go to return in a taxicab."

"You're not going alone on board the Sea Nymph?"

"Adolph will go with me, unless Brunner knows him. In that case I am going alone. We'll ask Adolph."

"But with only one man, or none!"

"My dear Mr. Smith! I can't take an army."

"But you can have a United States boat ordered to stop the Sea Nymph and take Brunner and his papers."

"And sacrifice Miss Nicholson and Commander Hadley? Brunner will lead us to the U-59, whose rendezvous, if I'm not mistaken, the *Fräulein* will make for."

"But you will have a United States boat follow you. You can't rescue Miss Nicholson and Hadley single-handed."

"What can a warship do? The 59 will probably be outside the three-mile limit and this country is not at war with the Hohenzollerns yet. If she sights the 57, which has been guilty of illegal acts, she can't fire on her for fear of killing those she wishes to save. If I get to the 59 first I will a tale unfold that will complicate matters for the Princess Bertha when she arrives; and judging by their strategy in showing themselves going east I expect to get there first. A warship in sight would merely keep the foxes under cover."

"But one just out of sight, *Fräulein!*" pleaded Mr. Smith. "You are relying entirely on outrageously good luck. You, who have always mixed your daring with brains, are becoming headstrong in the face of a brick wall. Because you can't see through it you will try to push your head through it. You are risking Germany's great hope in you on a turn of sheer luck, and if you lose, the work will all have to be done over again. You are tired and are not thinking well."

Nada sank into a chair wearily.

"You are right, Herr Schmidt," she agreed. "I am tired, and I think that what I had to do to poor Schlatter has left me a little hysterical. Let me see. Yes! Arrange it with the Navy Yard commandant while I sleep. Use my name and this code word. Let the boat observe us by airplane. I think they'll probably transfer Miss Nicholson and Hadley to the U-59 to try to get the information out of Nicholson, while the *Fräulein,* now known, as she supposes, through my escape, will make a dash for Germany in the U-57. Or else she'll leave them on the 57 while she transfers for her dash on the 59. At any rate, there's sure to be a transfer. That will be the time for the warship to act—with half a dozen of the wonderful little launches you haven't heard of—she following at full speed. Be sure to impress on the commandant that any mistake will cost two lives valuable to America, and probably one valuable, I hope, to Germany."

Mr. Smith's eyes were shining with satisfaction and admiration.

"Now you are using your wonderful brain. It is the brain, *mein Fräulein,* as well as the courage and the wonderful woman's intuition, that has made you one of the great leaders of the great Germany. The wonderful brain!"

"Possibly! And now, my friend, I am going to use my wonderful teeth—though they are all but unnecessary upon Mrs. Smith's cooking—and then I'm going to close my wonderful eyes and take a wonderful nap for a wonderful half-hour before changing my name to Louise.

"After I have gone, there is other work for you to do. Here is a chart I have secured among other papers belonging to

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the *Fräulein*. It shows a schedule of proposed outrages, explosive and incendiary, with the day and the hour, the men furnishing the information of conditions, and the men assigned to the actual tasks. You will send a copy of it to the Department of Justice and another to the usual newspaper."

"America will be grateful to you, *Fräulein*."

"Ah! My friend! You do it to save American property and American lives. I do it to preserve at least a shadow of the good name of our dear Fatherland."

"I also, *Fräulein!* After the country of my children I love the country of my fathers, and hate the beast that is ravishing her of her good name. God punish it!"

CHAPTER XIII.

ORGANIZING REVOLT.

THE impossibility of getting out of narrow waters before daylight was the chief difficulty Von Heimer had to confront in the keeping of his promise to Bertha.

"Your best chance, *Fräulein*," he explained to her when she had helped Marian to bed, "is to release Miss Nicholson and Hadley and put out to sea openly. I propose again that you allow me to put them off the boat."

"Dead and with weighted feet, like poor Schlatter?"

Von Heimer ignored the suggestion other than to frown.

"With them on board we cannot get out unobserved. It will be daylight in an hour, and we can be traced from the air."

"What does that matter? They can't fire on us."

"You are risking everybody's life in assuming that."

"You are here to risk your lives."

"Not for such ends, *Fräulein*. Besides, there are many methods of capturing submarines besides firing on them."

"Can you get out in an hour?"

"Impossible! The boat isn't a flying machine."

"Then find a place away from the channels and submerge until it is dark again."

"The cold will be intense. A person in Miss Nicholson's condition will probably not be able to resist it."

"Nonsense! We'll wrap her up abundantly."

"I'd rather take a chance on getting out by daylight."

"Very well! Do whichever you like, only remember your given word. I am going to bed."

"This," muttered Von Heimer in English as she went, "is a hell of a mix-up. Lovely woman, why don't you stay at home and knit. We might indulge in war, but we should avoid melodrama. Send her up, there. We're going to try to break out past Block Island, with our fingers to our nose, and here's hoping they won't get furious and put a shell into us anyhow. That's what our own efficiency would command."

The periscope-table was suddenly shot with flashes of light upon the lazy ground swell of the sea, and in the flashes darted black specks scarcely less swift. Von Heimer, with an exclamation, pushed the signal to submerge again.

"Good Lord, Dusendorf! Did you see that? There's something a bit outside my calculations."

"What were they, sir?"

"I don't know, but they *move*. There must have been half a dozen of them. They must have been making fifty knots an hour. They looked like motor-boats. Too narrow and too long for hydroplanes. Let's get another peep at them. There they are. There's one almost still. Twenty feet long! Five men! There she goes, like a frightened trout; only I suspect, Dusendorf, that she isn't frightened.

"We can't go up. That flock could be on us like wasps before we could submerge. How much room have we? No use; we can't travel and keep out of sight, we must either heave to and go down, or travel with the periscope showing and let them follow us. What do you think?"

"Go down for an hour or so, and then if they still pick us up let them follow us. So long as we don't emerge they can't board us, and when we get outside we can lose them—if we wish."

"If we wish," Von Heimer nodded. "We've swallowed some camels, Dusendorf,

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but this gnat sticks in my throat. It's bad enough to attack a ship full of people you don't know. They have a chance, even if it's a slim one. But this—bah! They treat us as if they possessed the key and right to our most intimate honor. Their insolence is intolerable. We have no right to guard even our private virtue.

"This man, Hadley, is my friend. The girl is his sweetheart. He has written me letters about her and spoken of her to me. He was naval attaché in Berlin. A genuine man with a clean and fine love for a fine girl. And I am ordered to kill one and kidnap and probably kill the other, practically with my own hand, for the good of the Fatherland.

"Have you seen it, Dusendorf? Our Fatherland has come to be supported entirely by horror and murder. Have you seen it? Do we hesitate? Do we forgive? Do we relent? Are we generous, chivalrous, kind? A great foe to a great foe? Do we guard our honor, even at the expense of defeat and live or die like a gallant race?

"No! Murder, lust, slavery, broken faith, and the slaughter of innocents. These support the glory of our once great Fatherland. Oh, God! I cannot bear to think of it. But it's true! Shame! Shame! written on the pages of our history; ineradicable and eternal! Can't you see it, Dusendorf?"

"I can see it, sir," returned Dusendorf bitterly. "I have helped to write it there, and so have you. We are part of it, because we tried to do our duty first and ask questions afterward. I don't see anything that we can do. We can only go on until the end. You and I know that it isn't as far off as the high command persuades the people to believe—and that it is going the reverse way. We shall have to keep on until then."

"Add crime to crime and shame to shame? Not I! I've seen Nada. There's work to be done, Dusendorf. Big work! A spark from her fire has caught me. I'm ashamed. I've followed the tide of shame and taken part in it and bemoaned the sin, while she, a little woman, lambent, inspired, has been daring and opposing and has organized the heart of Germany. I'm ashamed to be behind while other men, and women, risk their lives to build up the Great Germany. Are you with me?"

"What can we do?"

"For the present we can keep quiet. We have to get to the open sea to redeem our promise, and we have to see to the *Fräulein's* personal safety. Well, there are several ways of doing that. Then we shall have to follow circumstances as they come; keeping our attitude secret if we can, but coming into the open if it's necessary. I don't know where Nada is, nor what she's doing, nor what she can give us to do, but I'm sure of some things I won't do, and if I know Nada, the things the *Fräulein* is trying to do will bring her orbit not far from Nada's before very long. Then, if action comes, I know which side I'm going to be on. What do you say?"

"Who is Nada?"

"She's the animating spirit of the New Germany, just as Bertha is the animating spirit of the old Hohenzollernism. She is Germany's political Joan of Arc. I'll tell you where she affects our present situation, as far as I was able to gather it in our short interview. Also she is my promised wife. When I came aboard I left her on the Stealaway."

Von Heimer related what he had learned on the Stealaway from Nada's first activities, the kidnaping of Marian, the execution of Schlatter, the escape of Hadley and Kuhn, the hunt for Nada and her supposed escape, what Nada knew or suspected of the documents they had brought over, the *Fräulein's* homicidal intentions toward Marian, the plain fact that the United States officers now knew that both Hadley and Marian were on the boat, and Bertha's consequent intention of either killing or taking them prisoners to Germany.

"This is the last crime of all that we are ordered to do now," he finished. "We are not even at war with this nation. Certainly we are not at war with a sick and helpless girl, whom we drag from the very doorsteps of her home as part of our propaganda of frightfulness. Are there no limits to the ignominy a strong seaman may be ordered to perform. I'm through with the Hohenzollerns. As soon as I get a chance

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I'm going to throw in my lot with Nada and the Great Germany—the true Fatherland."

"I'm with you, my commander. My life to your orders—for Germany."

Masking the action with their bodies they gripped hands.

"For Germany!"

"I wish you luck with your Joan, sir."

"I pray for her safety. I'll tell you more, Dusendorf. I think we can win most of the men over quietly. How many Prussians have we?"

"Three! Most of them are Bavarians and Saxons."

"And you and I are from Saxony. It's just as Nada said, and she has documents to prove it, Dusendorf, in the crucial moment the Bavarians and Saxons are going to be the ruin of the autocracy. We'll take the doctor first. He's a Bavarian, and I think he detests a Prussian almost as much as he does a British soldier and more than a British sailor. My friend, it is the deliberate design of the emperor to eliminate us as a military danger to Prussia and his dynasty in case of defeat."

"I don't think I understand you. How can he eliminate us?"

"Very simply, if we remain loyal to him long enough."

And Von Heimer whispered of black treachery of which Nada had the proof.

"Shall we start with the men now, or shall we get under way?"

"We'll pick out one or two now, and start in half an hour. You get the doctor aside. I'll start with the man on post. And listen, Dusendorf! If a man lets out what is known hereabouts as a yawp, or tries to get to the *Fräulein*—"

"Steel!"

"Unless we're already sure of a majority. In that case we want no German life. Say he tried to draw his side-arm on you when you ordered him to go to the commander."

"After what you've told me I don't think I shall have any casualties."

The man at the diving-wheel and the doctor were won over without difficulty, to the accompaniment, on the doctor's part of much German profanity, low-voiced but emphatic.

"Thunder and lightning," he ejaculated. "We get but what we deserve. Whoever heard of trusting the hard-faced Prussian pigs? It has been Prussia, Prussia, Prussia, for all the glory, and Bavaria for all the dirty work and taxes since Bismarck made emperors of boars and errand boys of free kings. Your kingdom and our kingdom, *mein Herr,* are adjuncts of Prussia—the outbuildings in which she—"

"You are right, *Herr Dokter*. And now we have descended to kidnaping girls. *Ach!* For armed forces to kidnap anything so feeble as a girl is bad enough, but to seize one whose puny resistance is mortgaged by an attack of appendicitis—"

"Of what?"

"Appendicitis! The girl has appendicitis. Didn't you know it?"

"For a very good reason, *mein Herr,* I did not. Who said she had appendicitis?"

"Did you ever hear of Dr. Brunner, one of the greatest surgeons in the world?"

"*Ach! Mein Gott im Himmel!* Did that pudding-faced Prussian jackass say that? No wonder the poor child kept babbling about appendicitis. I thought she was weak-minded through strain; though she seemed devilishly cool. I was about to make a note of the nervous oddity in my journal. Appendicitis! A corn-doctor could diagnose no worse."

"Hasn't she appendicitis?"

"You have seen her. She has had an attack of acute indigestion, caused, probably, by eating too much cucumber and ice-cream. I am told these American girls attempt things an ostrich would hesitate over. If ever I come within range of that world-famous idiot I shall shoot him, for the honor of German medicine. He is mad. All Prussians are mad."

The doctor, in his professional wrath, had managed the last remark in a stage whisper which would have filled the Hippodrome. A big seaman, who had scarcely been concealing an interest in the conference, stepped forward and saluted.

"Pardon, *Herr Dokter,*" he said, "did I hear you say that all Prussians are mad?"

"Since when did a Prussian seaman believe he might interrupt the conversation of his officers?" snapped Dusendorf.

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"Since a Prussian admiral came aboard, Herr Lieutenant. I heard much of what was said and shall report to the admiral the princess. To say that all Prussians are mad is lese-majesty. The Emperor is a Prussian. The Bavarians, *Herr Dokter,* are not as big as the little finger of Prussia's mailed hand."

Dusendorf was not quite ready for this. The doctor had sprung to his feet, white with rage, not only at the insult to Bavaria, but at the unheard of insolence of a seaman criticising his officers. Dusendorf put a hand on the doctor's shoulder.

"*Herr Dokter!*" he snapped sharply.

The doctor swung to left-face. In the eyes of the young officer was nothing but hard authority. The doctor saluted smartly, and on the swift acknowledgement, dropped back into his seat. Dusendorf turned to the seaman.

"These are trying times, Grossmer," he said, "and men's nerves are not under control. Dicipline relaxes a little on special service; but not too far. The *Herr Dokter* was saying that in battle all Prussians are mad. Your remark about Bavaria needs some apology. With the side-arm salute!"

The man, overawed for the moment, carried his hand smartly to his side-arm. All but the point was out, preparatory to bringing it up in salute, when Dusendorf struck under the forearm with a move of lightning. The man's weapon flew from his grasp and clattered down, while, with a single horrible gasp, the body crumpled to the deck.

Dusendorf's broad-bladed sheath-knife dripped blood, and his eyes flashed swift threat with one sweeping glance. The men stood, for a second, stupefied.

"This man must have gone insane!" Dusendorf snapped out. "First he came up and called the Herr Dokter a Bavarian pig, not fit to eat Prussian offal, and when I commanded him to apologize he drew his side-arm on me, as you can see. What Bavarian thinks the insult should have been overlooked?"

"We saw the man draw his weapon on an officer, Herr Lieutenant," said a Bavarian petty officer. "The war book provides only one punishment for that."

"How do we know that he drew his weapon on an officer?" demanded one of the remaining Prussians truculently. "We heard the officer order a salute. Perhaps Grossmer was about to salute with the side-arm."

"Does a man who has called an officer a Bavarian pig unfit for Prussian offal salute with the side-arm?" cried the Bavarian who had spoken before. "A Prussian has commanded mutiny against our officers little more than an hour ago. The Prussians think they own the empire. We, also, are Germans."

"You and the Saxons are Germans," sneered the other, "and the Prussians are rulers. Do you defy her highness?"

"A fine distinction, men! Germans for death, rulers for glory! Count the Prussians on this dangerous work. Three! The rest are merely Germans."

The door of Dusendorf's small sleeping quarters swung open, and Bertha, fully dressed but with her wonderful hair streaming over her shoulders, stood in the doorway. She looked around, and if her courage faltered her calm voice and commanding look gave no indication of it.

"What is this brawling?" she demanded. "Put the murderer of this man under arrest, whoever he is."

"Bavarians and Saxons," cried Dusendorf, "stand fast! I killed the man, Highness. He broke into a conversation between the Herr Dokter and myself to inform the Herr Dokter that Bavarians were swine unfit for Prussian offal. I commanded him to apologize. You may see his answer if you look at his empty scabbard."

Bertha looked, her mind busy to turn the affair to advantage.

"And this man," Dusendorf went on, pointing to the Prussian spokesman, "adds to the insult by speaking of the Bavarians and Saxons as German, and the Prussians as rulers."

"What is this?" cried Bertha turning angrily upon the Prussian. "All are Germans and all, under the Kaiser and his government, are equal rulers. Do Prussian soldiers draw weapons on their officers and insult the federated nations? You did well to be prompt, Herr Lieutenant. Put that man who is too good to be a German under

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arrest. His commander and I will decide his punishment later. Ask the commander for our position, Herr Lieutenant."

"We have only just got under way, Highness. We have been still in order to baffle the pursuit.

"Tell the commander I suggest a ration of rum for every man. They are cold."

"The men will have hot coffee at the scheduled time, which arrives in five minutes. Was the cold a consideration, Highness, when it was decided that not more than three Prussians be imperiled on any U-boat?"

"What are you talking about, Dusendorf?"

"We have learned from documentary evidence that because of the heavy losses on submarines it has been ordered that the crews be made up of Bavarians and Saxons, so as to conserve the military strength of Prussia in case of defeat and threatened revolution. The same plan is to be followed on the Western front when the Entente Allies begin their spring offensive. You are under arrest, *Fräulein.*"

This time Bertha was obviously shaken.

"You—you are quite mad!" she gasped. It is the traitorous girl, Nada, who has—"

"Men! Her confession! You were to be slaughtered for the Hohenzollern who feared a revolt in the face of defeat. The commander will address you when the *Fräulein* is under guard and he will give you the word of a German officer and a gentleman that what he will tell you is the truth. Stein and Vollmer, stand guard at the *Fräulein's* door until the men decide what they will do. The majority will rule, men. You decide for yourselves when you have heard the commander."

"And what about your commander's plighted word to me?" asked Bertha. "Is that at the whim of the majority, also?"

"A Saxon has more respect for a plighted word than a Prussian, *Fräulein.* The men will respect the commander's plighted word to the letter, as free men respect their honor more than their whims. The fact that you fear their decision may be counted as evidence of your own knowledge of what the commander will tell the men and how they may be expected to take it.

"The vote on what the commander proposes will be by secret ballot, men. Every man will be free to vote as he wills, but every man must stand by the decision of the majority. Is that agreed?"

There was a chorus of: "Ja! Ja!" The men shuffled awkwardly and bashfully about and looked at each other.

Finding that the sound of their own voices in free assembly before their officers had not annihilated them they smiled at each other with boyish nervousness; brief smiles that left their faces serious with the gravity of strong men confronting a new and sudden responsibility.

"Close the *Fräulein's* door. The commander is lowering the boat. Call the men from the motors and all other posts."

In a moment the half-dozen men on duty came trooping into the big living-room, receiving voluble and excited explanations as they came from the men who called them, and nodding their heads as men who had thought this before but had been alone in thinking of it.

"Gentlemen," began Dusendorf, "although I have had the privilege of organizing this meeting, I, also, am following a leader; the man who has led us, conserving our lives and considering our comfort and trying to be loyal to the hard orders of those who have considered neither. Gentlemen, the commander!"

Von Heimer had been standing by, his fine face white with the nervous strain and responsibility, but his eyes gleaming balls of light. He stepped forward.

"We are men," he said without preliminary. "What can there be higher than that on this earth! We are strong men, capable of taking in our two hands those things that we will to take and shaping them to our wills. And they should be strong and worthy things.

"We are not afraid of death. If Germany needs lives she may have ours. She may have them as a free love-gift. We have offered them a thousand times. But, by God, they need not be *stolen* from us. Germany need only play the pickpocket, filching our lives by subterfuge and theft that she may save the lives of more favored of her sons. Are the Prussians better Germans than we are? Are they

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more intelligent, stronger, more valuable to the Fatherland, that they should be kept alive? No! They have a worthier honor than that of value to the Fatherland. They are the bulwark and support of the Hohenzollerns. Therefore, let Bavarians and Saxons and Wurttembergers die.

"Men, I have not the proof in my hands at this moment, but I vouch the honor and life of a man who has led you and suffered with you and dared with you, that I know beyond a shadow of doubt that there exists or did exist a letter from the supreme authority to the woman in there telling her that she need not fear for the continued supremacy of Prussia; that the alarming losses of men in submarine exploits has led to the secret command that not more than three Prussians be assigned to any one crew engaged in dangerous enterprise, and that when the spring offensive of the Entente Allies begins it will be opposed chiefly by non-Prussian troops, so that the Prussian division may be strong to defend the monarchy in a crisis."

And then all the doubts and shame that had been inarticulate in the brave seaman's breast so long, poured from him in a stream of fiery eloquence, the theme of which was freedom and the Greater Germany and the Hohenzollern war. When he had finished he said, "Decide!" and stepped a pace backward.

Instantly the big Prussian, the remaining one of the three, stepped forward, vibrant and passionate.

"Who says a Prussian is not a German?" he challenged. "I have sought no better death than to die with my comrades for the Fatherland. What right has Prussia to shame her sons by letting them die last? We are a race of mighty men, and the man who keeps us in the background of the battle shames us with a shame we have never known before. I am for a free and united Germany. God save the Fatherland!"

It was done! Men shook his hands, clapped his back, shouted, laughed, cheered, even wept. They made a ballot-box of an empty shell-case.

Dusendorf, elected clerk of the election, registered every man's name, town, province, and state, and in ten minutes, by process of vote, had occurred the strangest revolution ever organized on this planet—a revolution by ballot at the bottom of the sea, in the freedom-breeding waters of America, a Hohenzollern in a guarded room, the dead body of a Hohenzollern slave bearing grim witness of the grim intent of these men toward any who tried to stem the tide.

Without a negative the men voted to follow the commander in whatever method they could best help the secret committees in Germany and the mysterious and wonderful Nada whose exploits had gripped their imaginations until they were almost ready to put her on a pedestal as a supernatural agent for the deliverance of the Fatherland.

"Why not release the Americans and put the Hohenzollern admiral aboard a neutral steamer and send her back to Germany with the news?" asked the big Prussian.

"We'll do that first," amended Von Heimer, "so as to carry out my promise to the *Fräulein*. If we try to land the Americans first we shall be boarded by American officers and the *Fräulein* will have to face trial for innumerable outrages against a neutral people, of which Nada has gathered abundant proof."

"That will help the revolution."

"At the cost of treachery. Our cause is too true and too deeply founded in the heart of Germany to need such a cheap advantage at the expense of our honor. That has been the Hohenzollern way; leading to ruin. I propose that you elect one of your number to inform the *Fräulein* of your decision."

"The Prussian, Franz Herrman!" somebody shouted.

It was seconded and carried. The Prussian knocked on the door of Bertha's room. The princess opened it, her hair this time done in coils on the top of her head, and shining like a crown.

Herrman saluted. "You are requested to present your admiral's commission to the commander, *Fräulein*."

"On board this boat I am 'Highness' not '*Fräulein*.' My commission is from

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his majesty. I will give it up only to him; not to mutineers."

"It will be returned to you, *Fräulein*. We wish to examine it."

"Examine it. Perhaps the name of your Kaiser will renew your loyalty," she agreed, handing it to him.

The Prussian handed it to Von Heimer, who spread it out upon a table, seized a piece of heavy blue pencil, and wrote across the document: "Void—Signature not recognized by Central Committee of Free Germany." Underneath this he wrote his name and rank.

Dusendorf followed suit; and each man in turn contributed his signature and rating to the voiding of an admiral's commission in the Imperial German Navy, signed by the Kaiser. Under all these again Von Heimer wrote: "Whoever is destined to punish the Hohenzollerns, Germans have inflicted the first stroke."

He handed the parchment back to Herrman.

"Tell the *Fräulein* that we shall try to assure her safe return so that she may show the Kaiser the beginning of doom."

The Prussian delivered the message with stern solemnity. Bertha stood in the doorway, looking over the crossed bayonets that guarded her, a smile of amused contempt on her face.

"Opera bouffe!" she murmured, "and not very good!"

"We cannot hope to equal the practised Hohenzollern buffoons," snapped Von Heimer. "Confine the prisoner. Men on duty, take your posts. The order of the day will be resumed. When the princess is safely delivered we shall decide our next move. The boat is now the first unit in the Navy of the Central Committee of Free Germany. Attention! Side-arms! —Salute!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A FLAG TO FIGHT UNDER.

THE Smithson, having reported that it had lost track of the U-57, and fearing that she might have doubled back in the darkness, had been recalled to take up the shadowing of the Sea Nymph. Therefore, as he could do no other, the commandant decided to trust to the intuition and underground knowledge of Nada for the precious lives that seemed to have been whisked helplessly beyond his protection.

To send out fast cruisers to search for the U-57 in the open sea, might mean the imperiling of those lives and the spoiling of the plan of his mysterious and highly endorsed ally, who had assured him, through her agent, of her belief that the ends of the two threads would meet at the rendezvous of the U-59, though she didn't know where that was.

Von Heimer, therefore, could trace no pursuit as he lifted the searching finger of his periscope cautiously above the surface, though he was, of course, ignorant of the cause. They glided uneventfully through the now smooth waters of the Sound, taking a sight now and then to make sure that they had a clear way, then submerging so as to take the periscope out of view.

Through the dangerous currents of the Race, Von Heimer piloted his boat almost awash. Block Island and Montauk Point, grim sentinels, saw them pass, but gave no sign, and two hours later they came to the surface and opened hatchways and conning-tower to the fresh air of the open sea.

Hadley pounded on Marian's door.

"We're at sea, and the guests of honor of a revolution," he called. "Get dressed and come and look at the ocean."

"How can I get dressed, silly, when I almost have appendicitis?" she returned.

"Appendicitis — humbug! The doctor says you haven't any more appendicitis than a crab, and a crab has no appendix."

"Oh, very well! I suspected it myself. That's why I'm dressed already; though almost frozen."

The door was pushed open, and Marian stood there smiling.

"I had a good sleep," she said, as though still enjoying the memory of it. "I knew the greatest surgeon in the world was a fool. Where's Bertha?"

"A prisoner! The men under Von Heimer and Dusendorf have revolted and gone over to the movement in which Nada is one of the chiefs."

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"And you didn't call me!"

"I couldn't disturb them, dear. I saw our own revolution in a new light. The despair of men's souls for their homeland! Deep, and tragic, and bitter in the breaking of tradition for the sake of liberty and honor. Dusendorf and Von Heimer are ten years older. They descended into hell! These are great, brave men, dear. I feel little and trifling compared with them in the tragedy of their upheaval."

She stepped close to him and looked up into the strong face and splendid eyes that had seen visions and felt in sympathy the purging fire that had flashed through other men's souls. She gripped his arms, her own eyes shining with admiration and love.

"That's because you are that kind of man yourself, as our fathers were, and feel the noble heat of their fire. If there were not something tragic and sorrowful in it, it wouldn't be noble; just selfish. Danger doesn't make it noble. It's the sorrow of broken ties. The great, brave men! I'm glad I didn't see it. It was their private trouble."

"It wasn't a spectacle, indeed. I kept very still so that they'd think I was asleep."

"You're a big man, too. You—"

"Not to-day! Here are men matched with their big events. That lifts them past the measurements of men following the trifling day to day adventures."

"Am I a trifling day to day adventure?"

"You—I—Marian! I—"

"I haven't appendicitis!"

"No! It was—"

"And the country seems to be saved from poor Bertha's machinations, at all events. And nothing could be more romantic than a submarine and a revolution. And after bothering me with hundreds of inopportune and inconvenient proposals, I'm—"

"For the hundred and first and last time, Marian, will you marry me?"

"I will! Let's go and look at the ocean. Where's Bertha?"

"Looking at the ocean, too, under guard. All the men are taking the air."

"Poor Bertha! I wonder if she'd like me to talk to her, or if—do we have to climb that ladder, or can we be elevated?"

"Boat ahead, sir," cried the lookout. "Three points to starb'd, seven miles, bearing down on our course."

Von Heimer, having heard Marian's voice, was half-way down the ladder.

"What do you make her?"

"Motor yacht! American build. Stars and Stripes mast and fore. Some yacht club ensign at the stern. She's signaling."

"All hands except gunners and lookout below. Posts for diving! She may be harmless, but the prisoner has our word to deliver her safely."

From below, this time, came another hail.

"Submarine signal, sir. U-59! Seems about three miles on the port bow and forward, submerged!"

"What do you say, men? Do we avoid her, or do we put the *Fräulein* aboard her. She's evidently seen us and the yacht and gone down. Shall we avoid her."

"Why should we avoid her, Herr Lieutenant?" asked the petty officer who had sided with Dusendorf. "We should not begin by running away from equal strength. Tell them to send a boat off for the *Fräulein;* and send word that if they'll wait around until we get rid of our guests we'll come back and either convert them or submerge them forever."

The men laughed, and agreed that they'd rather be led into a fight than away from one.

"What do you make the yacht, now?" asked Dusendorf.

"New Rochelle Yacht Club, sir. She's using the secret code signals."

"Bear down on her, full speed, Dusendorf. Stand by the starb'd tubes. Who can she be, do you think?"

"What about your friend Brunner?" suggested Hadley. "Don't you think it might be Brunner, *Fräulein?*"

"Frankly, I'm puzzled," Bertha admitted easily. "His orders were to go to Washington. End this baby revolution, Von Heimer, and let us work together for the good of the Fatherland. I will forgive everything and reward you."

"It is for us to forgive and reward, now, *Fräulein,*" answered Von Heimer. "When the Hohenzollerns begin to talk of forgiveness and rewards it is when they have lost

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the power to give either. If this is Brunner he doesn't enjoy your immunity. I shall arrest him and hold him to Nada's orders."

"If it is Brunner, you may shoot him."

"The reward of the Hohenzollerns for faithful service!"

Bertha bit her lip in vexation over the slip.

"What do you make her now?" Von Heimer called.

"Sea Nymph, New Rochelle, No. 27. Neutral Investigation Bureau. Department of U. S. No. 1 aboard. Orders! Not safe to use wireless."

"Von Heimer," said Bertha, "do me one favor. Ask what in the name of Siegfried that eternal idiot Brunner is doing here."

Von Heimer obliged; the information being exactly what he desired also.

"*Fräulein's* orders by telephone," came the answer.

"He's quite mad. I never gave such orders. How could I, seeing I haven't left this boat?"

"*Fräulein* never left boat. Says No. 1 is insane."

"Received telephone message saying to go with girl Louise to rendezvous of 59. Girl's to board 59 with papers and *Fräulein's* trunk. Girl has papers now. Traitor."

"Nada!" said Bertha, Von Heimer, and Hadley in one breath.

Von Heimer and Hadley were on the platform and by the lookout before either had completed another breath.

"Tell them not to harm the girl on their lives," shouted Von Heimer, seizing a bundle of flags and holding them to the signaler as if a multiplicity of quite meaningless signals would increase speed.

The lookout with the glasses turned to him.

"Nobody paying attention to flags, sir. Four men chasing girl. She's up the steps and into the wheel-house. Man at wheel runs out under her pistol. She's at top of steps. Men below, daren't rush her."

"Full speed! My God, men! Full speed! It's Nada. Bring rifles and pick 'em off. Hurry! Hurry! The glasses! One of 'em runs off! For a rifle, probably. Hurry, men! Distance: twelve hundred meters!"

Two men rushed up with rifles just as one of the four men on the Sea Nymph ran along the deck with another. With the combined speed of the two boats the distance was changing at the rate of forty knots an hour.

Von Heimer snatched one rifle. The big Prussian, Herrman, sighted the other. With the incredible swiftness of trained machines they flashed wicked eyes down the barrels, and at practically the same instant they fired.

The man with the rifle leaped in the air and fell sprawled out, without another move.

"My shot, Herr Lieutenant!"

"Mine!"

"Both!" Hadley compromised.

Two pairs of glasses were turned swiftly on the submarine, picking out Von Heimer, with the rifle, and Hadley, free and making smiling comment.

Instantly a man ran to the auxiliary steering wheel and swung the boat hard to port, then flung himself flat on the deck and held it there.

The boat swung around beautifully, with a wide, white, swirling wake, and made full speed ahead in the opposite direction.

"They're using their wireless to the U-59," called the operator from below, a moment later.

The maneuver had also carried the wheel-house out of view from the submarine. The speed of the boats was very evenly matched. By the time the submarine could overtake the Sea Nymph, murder might have been done.

"Bear off two points to starb'd and hold it," shouted Hadley, suddenly springing to action. "I'll stop her. Clear away for this little beauty."

He swung the three-inch quick-firer forward.

"Bert! You'll sink them in thirty seconds from this distance," gasped Von Heimer.

"Not this boy, young man! You're thinking of German shooting. Another point to starb'd there! What a beautiful sea for nice shooting. Look out!"

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The little piece roared its angry battle-cry. At the stern of the Sea Nymph the water heaved up in first a huge bowl and then a tall straight column from the center of it, followed instantly by the sound of the explosion.

"Shot her propellers away. There's probably a tidy hole in her, but she should float for half an hour anyway. Three points back to port. There's the challenge of the U-59. Bad shooting!"

Two miles of starboard and astern, the U-59 had emerged and was coming full speed, having got the Sea Nymph's wireless. A shot from her three-inch gun, though badly aimed, told that she meant grim business.

"Men, we need a flag to fight under," cried Von Heimer. "We can't fight Hohenzollern under the Hohenzollern flag. We'll borrow the Stars and Stripes until we get a flag of our own. We'll apologize for it later, Hadley. Man the six-inch piece aft."

Like machines the men sprang to obey.

"Let me point her, Von Heimer," begged Hadley. "Let an American point your first shot for freedom. I'll apologize later, too."

"The Herr Commander Hadley will point the gun in protection of American lives," commanded Von Heimer.

"Steam on the port bow forward, sir," shouted the lookout. "Fast launches coming like light. An aeroplane overhead."

Another shell tore up the water a hundred yards astern.

"We'll let the spectators see one good shot, I hope," said Hadley, who had been busy scribbling figures on a bit of paper.

He changed the elevation of the gun so imperceptibly it seemed not to change at all; then he fired.

"Submarine ahoy! What boat is that, and what the devil do you mean by going into action with the Stars and Stripes flying?" came a hail from one of the water sprites, created by Eric Nicholson.

"Didn't have any other flag to fight under, old top," shouted Hadley. "We're a revolution and an American Expeditionary force and Relief Party all in one. Pick up the survivors from that Hohenzollern submarine we just submerged. We haven't finished our first battle yet. I'm Hadley, Miss Nicholson's aboard. Send a chaser back to the Smithson to wireless it to her father."

"He's aboard! Came in one!" shouted the officer, and with a whisk his boat was gone.

They were alongside the Sea Nymph, which was settling rapidly. Half a dozen men sprang aboard her and hustled the three huddled men as prisoners to the submarine. Nada came tripping down the wheel-house steps to be caught in Von Heimer's arms, who leaped back to the deck of the U-boat.

"I've got it, Rupert!" cried Nada. "Zimmerman's own letter offering territory and support to Mexico and Japan in return for war on the United States. This is the doom of tyranny. Soon the United States will be in, and then—revolution."

"It's begun, sweetheart! This boat is the first unit of our fleet. Head for the United States war-ship and prepare to fire a salute. Here is the *Fräulein,* witnessing our first victory."

The *Fräulein,* deathly white, was staring at Nada.

"You have the papers, Nada?" she asked.

Nada nodded.

"Yes, Highness! Believe me, I am very sorry for you. You have been wonderful but mistaken."

"To be truly wonderful one must not be mistaken, Nada. I have tried to act for the glory of the Fatherland. So, alas, has the great Kaiser. Perhaps we have been hypnotized by a narrow view. We have lived according to our traditions, but new standards are crowding out the old ones. We have loved the Fatherland. Perhaps we thought we were too much of the Fatherland. This was my plan, not his. The genius of Germany is dead."

With a quick move she had placed something on her tongue, and before a move could be made to save her she fell to the deck. The genius of Germany was no more.

(The End.)

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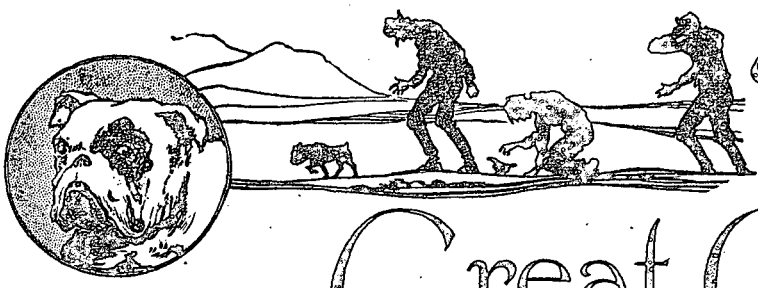

The Great God Gold and — Stub

by Edwin L. Sabin

HEFFLESTEINER had inherited the map, somehow, some way, from an uncle, he said. It was dirty enough to be the original, but, of course, it wasn't the original. Peg-Leg Smith, the trapper, couldn't read or write, and this map was fairly lettered under the thumbmarks.

The age of the map really cut little figure, as long as the three black knobs were there: three black knobs, bursting with gold and assaying eighty per cent pure.

Let me spell that out. Eighty per cent pure stuff—black spar running some $385,000 to the ton. All waiting there, in the waiting desert, ever since in '37 or '38 old Peg-Leg had stumped on his wooden prop.

And now, again, here were we, three more white men, a burro and a bulldog, hotfooting on the trail to the Great God Gold and his secret hangout in the otherwise God-forsaken desert—the trickiest desert on the American Continent. Believe me!

According to the laws of chance as they prevail anywhere else we should have got along very well. We went in early. We had Heff's uncle's map with the arrow pointing to the lost Peg-Legs. We had a government map with washes and waterholes supposed to be corraled and snubbed tight—and we reckoned that we knew considerable, ourselves.

The burro packed for us, and Stub packed for himself. By the looks of him he'd been doing this, several years.

Yuma didn't claim him. He must have wandered in from some desert rat's camp or have been dropped behind by a passing outfit. A brindle-faced, red-eyed, ragged-eared, bobbed-tailed white bulldog, who took up with the heels of Hefflesteiner's boots and dodged the toes.

Strange how a dog will choose for his god one of kicks and curses when he might have a better. But Stub insisted upon coming along, although Heff kicked him twice into the opposite direction.

At first the desert was pretty good to us. It doled out trails and water and let the black knobs stay anchored on Heff's map.

Stub, he had a great time. Never mind the burro; some rustler, of course, that being the nature of the beast; but Stub proved out a first-class rustler. The burro earned her keep; Stub, he was the supercargo, and he tried his best to furnish his own subsistence — rabbits, rats, lizards (actually ate lizards), dried bones—and Lord, how dry bones can get, on the desert, the drying-est out place under the canopy. Set my teeth on edge to hear him crunch.

Stub asked no favors; properly thankful for bacon scraps, but asked no favors except a tin cupful or two of water, occasionally, by day, or in a dry camp, and the privilege at night of sleeping on Heff's stomach. Usually began a little way off, and as the chill keened sneaked to Heff's legs, and then on up.

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"Damn that dog! Some night I'll kill him," bawled Heff.

And that might be. The desert law reduces to the law of self-preservation, and Heff had a weak stomach. Also, being Stub's god, he was entitled to exercise a god's right over life and death.

Furthermore, he didn't love Stub nearly so much as Stub loved him, and Stub had taken the chances.

As for Frazier and me, we sort of catered to Stub, who didn't particularly cater to us. But I know dog, and here was a true, brave-hearted little bull; a one-man's dog, no matter the kind of man.

Well, Stub furnished us some entertainment, if men chasing a lost Peg-Leg mine across the desert require any other entertainment. And presently the desert bucked up—taking, as it were, a more decided interest, in its large, aloof, imperialistic way, now that it saw we were actually bound on by direct attack.

I don't say that the government map was wrong when it was made. I don't say that Heff's map had been wrong when it was made—although these amateur maps made by somebody blinded with local color, especially when that color is yellow, are too free and easy for me.

But I do say that the desert is no fit terrain to be listed and filed in any war portfolio. It changes—it swaps ends faster than an outlaw horse.

The desert is powerful cunning; you wouldn't guess that anything so big and silent could be so cunning.

I'll pass over those devilish preliminaries by which, just irregular and gradual enough to provoke us on, it tolled us through the everlasting dunes, the cactuses, the powdery sand, the graveled washes, the alkali sinks, poison white, teased us with sudden ridges that proved to be bare rock as hopeless as the bark of the Ancient Mariner, with wavering mirages, with water-holes long dry, with side-winders, centipedes, Gila monsters—bed fellows worse than Stub; sucked at us all the hot days and all the cold nights; but ever fed us on expectation, expectation.

The burro got bit by something or other; at least, we found her in the morning, dead and swelled up and bad. We didn't dare eat her, we didn't dare drink her.

This was the eleventh or twelfth day, I think. We ought to be sighting those three black knobs, soon now, according to Heff's map. The map said: "Water here," at the base of the middle knob.

The spot had been getting greener and greener (on the map), and we left most of our stuff with the burro, and pushed ahead. The time had come when we were seeing green and sparkly blue instead of yellow. The country closed in behind and opened out before; shimmered with the desert's silent laugh.

Stub was still with us. Queer, too, as I look back upon it. Pickings were mighty poor, for a dog. He carried no canteen, and it was tough to have the canteens always in somebody else's possession, especially when somebody else will fight rather than surrender a drop.

But somehow Stub hung on. He was such a roustabout that he had ways and means. I know that we neglected him shamefully—yet no more than is natural when men become crafty brutes; each for himself, jealous of the others.

During the day Stub would lag behind, to rest and pant in the penciled shade of a cactus or a narrowed rock. He was thin enough for that. But he always tottered into camp, sometimes late. Frazier and I doled out to him a mouthful or two, perhaps; Hefflesteiner never, and yet Stub scarcely thanked us, but loved Heff.

In the cool of the night he usually made off; might be gone till dawn, only to toil waveringly in, for a nap on Heff's stomach until Heff cursed him and threw him off. Other things lived, in this desert; night prowlers, also; and I suppose he caught a bite, here and there. Probably knew where to dig for water, like a fox or coyote, and chewed out moisture.

Now that we all were down to the instinct level, he was smarter than we, and had the confidence to cover more territory.

You've read of people trapped by the desert, and kept mad, sheer mad, with thirst? The details aren't at all pleasant, yet they never have all been told, for only the desert knows. At any rate, we were it.

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We hadn't struck water in—maybe three days. I'm not certain as to the length of time. I'm not certain whether this was the third day, or what. Three days doesn't seem a very long stretch, when you've started with a canteen, I'll admit—except on the desert. But let me impress upon you this fact: that what you don't drink, on the desert, the desert drinks, and it won't quit. It's merely a race to see which will empty the canteen.

Toward evening of the last day Hefflesteiner flopped down first, locating camp where he landed. He was the largest man of the bunch, and had the smallest heart. I understand that on the desert the largest man generally peters out the earliest. We straggled in Frazier and I, and flopped down, too.

Camp didn't amount to much. We weren't eating, any more. The tongues of all of us were pretty thick — and that sort of story.

We'd been seeing things, of course. Stub wasn't with us. It occurred to me, I wasn't sure that he'd been with us for a day or two.

Not sure, you understand. There were times when I had seen him plain, trotting at Heff's heels—but I had seen horses, emigrant outfits, trees, lakes, camps, and such impossible truck, and so I couldn't be sure of Stub.

The same old desert lay around us: yellow-white sand absolutely trackless except for claw and pad; rolling, billowy sand, broken by mock oases of dry sinks, leafless brush, cactus and Joshua trees, and low little rock outcrops.

There was no direction, other than by the sun—or when, occasionally, we lined a course by a peak that we saw or thought we saw, until the peak swung like a slow pendulum and we knew that it was wrong. Odd, when a peak ahead on your right gets over on your left; but that's desert magic.

Compass? Oh, yes; Heff had a compass, but the compass went wrong, too, and in a huff he threw it away. It weighed heavy, he claimed; chafed his bones, and was no good anyhow.

We lightened ourselves fast. Shelled off blankets, fry-pan, tin cups, coffee-pot, revolvers—no, Heff kept his. The government map was wrong—absolutely worthless. I believe that we started a fire with it, and gloated to watch it burn.

Hung hard to our canteens—force of habit, like a dog guards an old bone lest another dog will swipe it; shook them, gloated over them, cursed them, hugged them, slept on them, loved them, feared them, hoped for the miracle of the loaves and fishes done over into water, begrudged every mouthful, and coveted every mouthful. Just lived from little swig to little swig.

Hung hard to that infernal fetish of Heff's map, too. For without the map we were plumb lost. Even the sun was loco. So the map was the only thing left that we could depend on. Heff knew it was right, because it showed the Peg-Leg knobs (eighty per cent pure stuff) and said: "Water here."

Even the sun was loco. The sun was going to set in the north, due north. We lay and wheezed, waiting. When the sun set I, for one, was to have another little swig; the very instant that it set, I mean.

Heff and Frazier might object, in a peevish way; but they'd swig also, as long as they had something to swig with. We were always trying to swig on the sly, and scolding when we caught the other fellow.

"God, boys!" mumbled Frazier, turning over. "This is hell, ain't it!"

It was, with a slow sun.

"We got to find water to-morrow," rasped Heff, "or—"

"Well?" challenged Frazier. "Say it." There was an ugly pause. "Nobody draws lots on me, for anything," mumbled Frazier.

Where did he get that idea? Was he remembering stories that he'd read?

Heff, half sitting, half sprawling, had out his infernal map again, squinting at it in the blotch of his body on the sand. His big, cracked finger-nail wandered over it.

"Those Peg-Leg knobs ought to be right there," he pronounced painfully. "They ought to be right yonder. They got to be yonder."

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He scrambled to his knees and to his feet, and stood swaying and peering. He looked very tall. His revolver belt had been drawn to the limit, but hung loose and dangling, making him look taller still. It seemed to me, he must be getting a good view from away up there.

All around, beyond him, the horizon writhed and pulsated, and the desert surface heaved like a pacific ocean before a storm; fairly turned one dizzy. Heff staggered and set his foot square upon the map, crunching it. The map was so brittle that his foot cut clean through. But nobody cared.

I was too sick to care—and, besides, something was coming for us across the sand; something monstrous and near.

"Look at that!" wheezed Frazier, interested. "By golly, a lion—ain't it?"

"No, you fool!" I corrected. "It's a camel." He sort of irritated me, with his "lion," when camel was better. And couldn't he see?

"A Nubian lion, by golly," breathed Frazier. "Keep quiet, everybody. Have your gun ready, Heff. Quiet, everybody. He's a raw Nubian lion."

"I see 'em," was announcing Heff, above.

"It's a camel, I tell you!" I corrected, "A camel, with water in its stomach. Don't you know what water is? Let it come. Quiet, everybody."

"Quiet, everybody," reiterated Frazier. "Sh! A raw Nubian lion. We can"—and suddenly he lapsed. "Oh, hell!"

For the thing had dwindled, dwindled, down, down—cleared, and I saw that it was only Stub, poor little Stub, afar, low to the ground, trailing in again, by spurts, on blistered feet, from his last resting-place.

Yes, we had been sucking at raw lion-flesh, and opening a camel, and here out of that devilish desert came only poor little Stub.

But Hefflesteiner was talking on, peering in another direction entirely.

"I see 'em, boys! It's just as I thought. They're there."

"What?"

"The three knobs. You can see 'em plain now. Get up here and look where I'm looking. The three knobs, sure."

Up we scrambled, also.

"Where?"

"There." Heff pointed with wavering arm. "Straight yonder. Good God, haven't you eyes? Come on. We can make 'em by night."

We peered, from under shading hands, toward the sun. The desert surface rocked and shimmered, and the horizon swam hither-thither, distorted as if viewed through faulty glass.

"Yes, I see 'em," gasped Frazier. "That's right," he babbled. "You're right, Heff. Dead right. The three of 'em, like the map says. Black and yellow. Seems to me there's yellow. Wonder we didn't see 'em before. Hurrah!"

And I saw them, too—slightly quartering with the sun: three blackish knobs, hazily up-jutting, afloat on the heat stratum like buoys swinging at their moorings.

"They're north, though," babbled Frazier, crazily suspicious. "Wait. Let's figger. The map says west. The sun's setting north, ain't it?"

"Can't tell where it 'll set yet," rebuked Hefflesteiner. "Doesn't matter. What the hell does the sun matter? You see the knobs. Those are the Peg-Legs. Come on, or stay here. Got to make 'em."

He lurched forward, stepping hard.

"Got to make 'em," echoed Frazier, lurching after. "Ought to 've seen 'em before. Wasted time."

Pshaw! I followed Frazier, and in single file we three trudged. The sand squeaked beneath our uneven tread.

"Water at that middle knob," croaked Heff encouragingly.

"Water at that middle knob," repeated Frazier and I.

Water! Cool water! The three blackish knobs floated, now well atop, now nigh submerged, borne up and down on the heat sea. Water! Real water, at the farther edge, in the haven of the lost Peg-Legs.

Presently Hefflesteiner stopped short, and we almost ran into him. He worked at his canteen.

"Plumb forgot," he maundered thickly.

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"Ought to have had a drink. We didn't drink, did we? No use packing this stuff when there's more right ahead. Little swig all around, boys, and we'll travel faster."

"Little swig all round," we obediently repeated.

Heff tilted his canteen; Frazier tilted his; I tilted mine. Ah! That wetness—but warm, insipid, tasteless. Yet I couldn't let go—gulped, gulped, sucked, drained to the last drop. Ah! I was dry again.

The gurglings ceased. We gravely replaced the plugs, much as if we had drunk a silent toast.

"Get there now," uttered Hefflesteiner. "Little drink helpsh."

"Little drink helpsh." We plowed on. However, the little drink didn't help very much. It was gone, all sensation of it vanished.

The canteens dangled, Hefflesteiner's revolver thumped against his thigh; the sands squeaked, the sun sank lower, to flare into our eyes. Under it the three blackish knobs floated, floated, advancing, receding, now plain, now faint, but waiting, beckoning, promising.

Water at the middle one! The map said: "Water here." And the gold, the Great God Gold. Water first, then gold.

Trudge, trudge, trudge; squeak, squeak, squeak. How far were those damned knobs, anyway? Hefflesteiner's shadow stretched clear to my feet, and with bent head I stepped carefully on his hat brim. If I didn't, I'd be left.

That was my charm, my salvation. Frazier was stepping on his middle.

The sun had swallowed the knobs, drunk them up, one might think. At least, one could not see them through the dazzle. They were off there, of course—we were heading for them. No doubt about that. They were there, in the dazzle. If we might only stop, again, for a bit—

Heff pitched aside, and crouched panting, hand against his eyes; blind, he acted.

"Can't shee," he complained. "That damn' sun. Let'sh wait." He fumbled for his canteen. "Little drink," he murmured.

Down pitched Frazier and I, willingly enough. Hefflesteiner unscrewed his canteen plug; I unscrewed mine; we tilted and sucked. Not a drop for me; not a single drop perceptible. The very mouth of the canteen was hot, to my lips, but my tongue felt nothing as I licked with it, to invite the uttermost vestige of draining moisture.

"Who's got some water?" was demanding Hefflesteiner. "Little water. There'sh water at middle knob. Want to borrow shome now. Pay it back."

Nobody answered, except—

"God, how my eyes hurt!" groaned Frazier.

Hurt? Whew! Burning, boring, torturing coals—they, too, crying for water, cool water. So we lay, lax and miserable, twitching eyes closed tight to the glare, the air hot above, the sand hot beneath, and Hefflesteiner spasmodically implored, begged, cursed.

"Nice set of pardners," finally he babbled. "Nice shet of pardners—won't share canteen—no drink—no little drink."

We let him grumble and berate. I didn't have energy enough to dispute. What difference? Frazier occasionally groaned, otherwise was dumb. So we lay. Heff murmured fitfully. Perhaps we all dozed off.

The desert slightly breathed, with an infinitesimal waft of air like the passage of a mighty pinion. That is what aroused me. It was a call. We stirred, and unclosed our eyes about together.

The sun had set, the air no longer was glary and dazzling—it was cool and tenuous, and save for the yellow glow yonder where bided the Great God Gold, all the horizon was darkling purplish.

Frazier had set up, to rub his reddened eyes with a stiff hand, and to blink around.

"Looking for those knobs," he explained. "Don't see 'em. Do you?"

"See 'em if stand up," croaked Heff. "Sure. Over there. Got to be." And—"Who'll gimme drink? Jus' little drink," he begged.

Doubtless we might see the knobs if we stood up, but a languor chained us where we were. The coolness of the swiftly gathering night was momentarily delicious.

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Each waited for the other to do the reconnoitering. Frazier decided tersely.

"Couldn't reach 'em to-night, anyhow. Not in dark. You fellows go on, if you want to. I'm all in."

His voice was clearer than ours—had a little more precision to it.

"Can't reach 'em to-night," agreed Hefflesteiner. "Might lose losht Peg-Legs again. Start early in the morning. Wish I had drink," he added.

So did I; a drink for myself. What fools we had been to drain our canteens on a mere venture! Desert distances are so deceptive. We should have known. Crazy Hefflesteiner was to blame—the big boob. He set the example.

The short twilight deepened rapidly, the horizons narrowed their circle around us, and extended their veiled circumference nearer, nearer; a released night-bird darted over. Frazier nodded down the back trail.

"Stub," he said, "I'll be darned. Still a coming, poor little devil."

And Stub it was, again, tracking wearily on, through the brooding purple by which the desert night was exorcising the desert day.

Stub seemed powerful tired. He could just about navigate, and that was all. Took him a long time to arrive, but arrive he did; sank down flat, mouth open (like a panting chicken); surveyed us in dim, sick manner; began to crawl forward on his belly; tried to wag his stump of a tail as he sniffed at me and at Frazier—withdrew from Frazier's hand-pat and sought Heff. I noted that his chops were stained.

Heff savagely kicked out at him, caught him full, and sent him sliding.

"Damn' cur! What's sneaking 'round here for? Go off and die somewhere else," snarled Heff.

"That's a fine way to treat a dog," blurted Frazier.

"Not my dog. Didn't invite him," grumbled Heff. "Wish he'd croak and be done with it. Follows us like coyote."

"You brute!" growled Frazier.

We were too inert to do more. Stub had stuck where he had stopped; stayed exactly as he was, crumpled, limp, and heaving. He hadn't uttered a yelp. If the kick hadn't broken his back, it might well have broken his heart.

The shadows thickened. I guess I dozed off again, for the next thing I noticed was Frazier kneeling over Stub, in the half-light of desert night, fussing with him. Kneeling over him with a canteen—what? Water! Who had water? Frazier! He'd been holding out on us.

The idea was astounding, stunning. Sometimes a fellow can be so eager that he is paralyzed, like a bird-dog at a stand in a bunch of quail. My voice didn't work; neither would my muscles; I only trembled and yearned and peered, hot where before I was cold.

Frazier was clearly outlined in the starshine; he was kneeling, and he tilted his canteen, and he squeezed from a rag into Stub's mouth. I could hear them both wheeze. Lord, if I might but have a mouthful from that rag!

There was a rush and a hoarse bawl, and Hefflesteiner was upon them. I'd forgotten Hefflesteiner. He'd waked up, too.

Now a fight! Stub yelped—he was underfoot. A drop of water hit my face. Down went Heff and Frazier in a heap; tumbled, squirmed, staggered up together—the canteen between them, Heff jerking at it, Frazier doubled over it to keep it, and gasping, "Wait! Wait!"

Heff tore it free (broke the strap) and, whirling, glued his lips to it—dashed it into the sand with one of his curses, and stamped on it.

Frazier picked it up.

"Well," he panted, "that's the limit! You've done it now, you dub! You go dry, and so do we!"

"I'll kill you!" screamed Hefflesteiner. "You were holding out on us. I been watching. I knew you had water. You thought you'd phony on us—calculated—to—"

"You're a liar!" answered Frazier clearly. "I didn't drink. There was half a pint of water in that canteen; enough to carry us through, and the dog, too, if we went easy. Easy, mind you; sensible man's way, not your way. You've been drinking twice to my once. I wouldn't have cared; now—" and he shrugged his

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shoulders. "Oh, heck! Plumb wasted, after all. Why didn't you wait?"

"I'll kill that dog," rasped Heff. "Where is he? Come here, you!"

"You go to bed," pronounced Frazier. "What do you want to kill a dog for? Go to bed."

He stooped and picked up the rag—his handkerchief; methodically wrung it to the last drop over the mouth of the canteen. Hefflesteiner grabbed it from him and sucked at it ravenously.

Frazier came back past me with his battered canteen.

"I wasn't holding out," he said, lying down. "It was to be share alike to-morrow. I staved off drinking on purpose. Didn't mind. But I had to help the dog a little. He was in bad shape. He's such a plucky rascal."

"None left?" I begged.

Frazier grimly laughed.

"Ten drops—and they won't be there by morning. Good night."

Mumbling and cursing, Hefflesteiner lunged to bed. Stub was weakly sitting. This night he did not sleep on Heff's stomach.

The torturing hours drifted by, and, as is apt to be the case, the heaviest sleep came toward morning. I reckon a fellow is most exhausted then. However, I waked to a thunderous noise; so did Frazier, by his action—popping bolt upright on hands and haunches.

It took a minute for me to get my addled wits together. The sun was in the sky once more; I lay in the scorching, fuming desert, being shriveled to a crisp. And Hefflesteiner, red, unkempt, was leaning on an elbow and squinting along his revolver-barrel.

The muzzle described curious figures—eights and jig-saw puzzles—in the air. Beyond, fifty yards maybe, was Stub, on his way out or on his way in again, but standing, quartering, with tentative, inquiring mien, head low and turned, to face our direction.

Hefflesteiner squinted more intense, his upper lip lifted avidly.

"Bang!" The sand flew in a spurt, far wide of Stub.

"Come 'ere, you!" yelled Hefflesteiner. "You blankety blank, come 'ere!"

But after momentary pause, as though dully uncertain, Stub was away, head down, haunches drooped; trot, trot, with never another backward glance, out into the desert.

Hefflesteiner shot wildly once again, and swore.

"Nice invitation," remarked Frazier. "What you trying to do, shooting up the country that way?"

Heff raved.

"I'll get him yet. Did you see his mouth? I caught him sneaking in, the devil! That's what keeps him up—*that!* And he figgers on us when he goes dry. Savvy? But I'll beat him to it. I got to have a drink, man. A drink! He knows, rot his hide! He couldn't come close, where I could lay my hands on him. I'll drill him, though, next time."

"You'll never see that dog again," muttered Frazier.

"By God, if it isn't him, then, it 'll be somebody else."

The ugliest words ever uttered. Stub or us, did he mean—and he had the gun! So it had come to that, had it? There'd be no more sleep for me. Even vision of lion or camel dwindled, repugnant and nauseous, down to little Stub—or us.

Frazier sprang right up.

"None of that, Heff," he ordered. "Cut it out. We're going to the Peg-Legs. Reach 'em by noon. Let's start, boys. Come on, Heff. Water at the middle butte, you know. Come on. We're good for it. Sure we are. Water and the eighty per cent stuff. I can see the knobs plain. *They* aren't far. There they are; can't you see 'em?"

Heff muttered something; rose staggeringly. My joints creaked like saddle-leather when I followed suit. Ah! Phew! Oh, for a drink—of water! The Peg-Leg knobs? Where now?

Giddy, we swayed and blinked, Heff and I, staring about with those hot, weak eyes to invite the horizon nearer; to conjure out the throne of water, and of the Great God Gold.

Gradually I saw them. They were there,

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the three blackish knobs—closer, I fancied, bobbing again or swimming idly upon the heat ripples. No? Yes! Of course they were there. We all saw them.

"Lead us to 'em, Heff," bade Frazier. "You're the trail-maker. You found 'em first. Bert and I'll back you up. Strike out."

So we started on, Hefflesteiner before. That was well.

Trudge, trudge, trudge, and the dry sand squeaked, and our blistered feet had no feeling, and our tongues flopped in our open mouths, and our breath whistled through our husky throats. Mummies, we moved; time-parched, air-cured, desiccated Aztec mummies, ghastly resurrections of this southwest desert; new-world, old-world wandering Jews.

The three blackish knobs stayed where they were.

Too much. No go. We had to quit for a spell. Sun beating down. Sand beating up. Air-waves scorching us like the stings of a centiped's claws. And not a drop of sweat for moisture.

We had halted beside one of those three-branched candelabra cactuses — not the sappy kind, but thorny, pithy, juiceless as a Joshua tree—and in that mockery of shade gasped and reeled and waited. The three Peg-Leg knobs swam and floated, hazy, light, waiting. Some distance they were yet — but seemed to me they were nearer.

Frazier silently pointed, behind Hefflesteiner's hulking back, as signal to me. Eh? What? That thing? Why, yes—another camel; or, no, Stub, riding in from our left atop one of those desert sand-billows.

Surely poor little Stub, coming slowly down and up amidst the dunes, shipwrecked and carried, as it were, from billow to billow, until I at last comprehended that it was he who was moving, outfooting the treadmill waves.

And somehow his jog had the gait of a homing. But he hadn't forgotten his send-off. He began to hesitate; heart sort of failed him.

Friends, or enemies? Or, rather, friend or enemy, for his mind, as anybody might sense, was all on his one god, Heff; therefore, friend or enemy?

He paused, sheer wistful; sidled farther, hoping; kept stopping and sidling—wagging, asking. Heff had not made a sign—by George, though, look at those hands twitch—and Stub *felt*. He was almost to us when he dodged and shrank as though from a lash-cut just missing him.

Heff blared out at him.

"Come 'ere!"

"Easy. Let him alone," warned Frazier.

"Come 'ere, you!"

That was enough for Stub. His god was still angry; he wavered an instant; turned around, headed away, was bound out once more, trotting at a slink, the heart of him crushed—he had no place in the party.

With an oath Heff clapped hand to gun.

"No, I don't," he snarled thickly at us—and what a face! "I save those shells, but I get that dog. Dog has nothing on me—nothing on me, I tell you, when I want drink."

He ran, tottering, reaching, summoning, cursing, imploring—grotesque—on the trail of Stub. I thought that he was going to make it with the first dash.

Stub did indeed halt; stood hesitant, eying him, obedience to love and law striving against instinct; stood until with a lurching charge of that ravenous body those curving clawlike fingers grabbed for his dingy hide, when, thank Heaven, he slipped from under in a startled swerve and broke to his trot again.

Thank Heaven, I say. Seemed to me, sick as I was, that I couldn't stomach those fingers closing on that dog, and the rest that might happen.

Hefflesteiner, bellowing, raving, went lurching on, blood mad. Frazier's quick voice shattered the horrid spell.

"That won't do. He'll kill himself, he'll be down and out." He ran, calling: "Heff! Man, man! Quit it! Never mind the dog. You don't want the dog. Let him go. We're for the Peg-Legs. They're not there; they're yonder."

I tried to run. In a crooked, drunken line we lumbered on this new course set for us by the trotting Stub. Frazier continued to call, hoarse and frantic.

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"Not that way. We'll lose the Peg-Legs, Heff." He reckoned on scaring him. "Don't get among the dunes. Let the dog go. Wait a minute, man."

Stub was keeping out of reach—just out of reach. You'd think he was playing a game. Lord, he ought to be more careful! And we were veering off—veering off from the knobs, when every step meant so much.

Damn the dog, and Heff. We couldn't afford it. We'd be dead men; this was no way to do now, throw away the chance of the Peg-Legs — and water at the middle knob—for a dog, even Stub.

Stub, breaking into a lope, tolled on and disappeared among the rolling dunes. Heff plunged down in after him. Frazier followed.

Queer how a man's legs will carry him along when he doesn't know that they're working—like a chicken flopping when its head has been cut off, I suppose; but I got there, too; pretty soon sensed that I'd somehow found Frazier in a hollow kneeling over Hefflesteiner, who was flat.

I think that Frazier was trying to turn him over, and maybe I started to help. For a few moments things went black on me. It was terrible hot in here; hot and hopeless.

When I came to, Heff had been turned. We all were sprawling together, Frazier half up and holding his hat over for shade; and next, while we wheezed and babbled, Stub's head was thrust in between, sniffing, and he licked Heff's face.

Licked that face the dog; licked the face of his brute god! Do you comprehend what it meant? I didn't fully; I mainly watched and wondered, in stupid fashion, but Frazier's voice exploded highly.

"Water! He's licking his face! See that? Water!"

"Eh?"

"He can't lick unless his tongue's been wet. It *is* wet! There's water near, sure. We got to get it."

Of course. The fact dawned upon me while Frazier was struggling to his feet. He even helped me to mine. A marvel, that man. We tottered dizzily.

"Stub! Here, Stub!"

He would show us. No. He refused to budge—wriggled his stump, but crouched beside Hefflesteiner and whined.

"Track him," muttered Frazier, and set out, along the sand swale.

We set out. Oddly enough, at this crisis, so far gone was I that the word water didn't picture to me; I only had the vague idea that we must bring some to Heff in our hats—give him a wash and a drink. To me water didn't especially matter. I couldn't imagine water.

Frazier led; I merely reeled after. The sand was soft, seemed to be dotted with innumerable tracks, descending, ascending, wandering; of coyotes and foxes, naturally, but same as dog tracks. If we'd had the pep we might have cast about and struck the main trail, but we were near blind. I didn't realize how hopeful all those tracks were; they confused and teased us, that was all. Frazier turned around.

"Won't do," he rapped harshly. "Have to drag Heff. Dog'll come them."

We toiled back. We wrestled with Heff. The thing had to be done. We were like two ants, at labor interminable. Dragged, panted, wheezed, paused to sink and breathe; dragged again, weaving by inches through the enclosing slopes of the fuming furnaces.

"I'd like to say that Stub knew. I believe that he did. At any rate, he went ahead; wanted more water for himself, no doubt. Now and then was lost to us; came to look us up; the last time, came with his jaws dripping; disappeared, but that lent us the final spurt, and we emerged.

Water! Sparkling, limpid water, and spots of green! I felt the call.

Frazier broke. He uttered a sharp, animal sound, dropped Heff, and careened forward, and by the time I got there, just as crazed, he was in, wallowing, stomach down, crying, fighting for breath.

Even then—

"Easy. Easy, lad. Take it slow," he gulped, head and heart true, as always.

Slow! I expect we absorbed a gallon in a few minutes through throat and skin. It's a wonder that it didn't sicken us; but we moved fast and, swishing the half-filled barrels, doused Heff from our hats, fetched him on and between drinks limbered him up by

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degrees under a tree. Stub lay soaked and blissful, watching.

It was one of those bottom-side-up little rivers which had here flopped and showed its face for perhaps fifty yards before it dived again; about four inches of water rippled over sand and gravel between high banks; a few low trees of strange kind—Lord knows how they got there, but water in the desert seems to create vegetation; a sprinkling of bunchy grass; above and below, dry washes, and on either side the bare dunes.

Drink, tend Hefflesteiner, drink, loll, doze—and swell like those Chinese bulbs set in a jar. This we did. By evening Heff was pretty well his natural self; we killed a couple of rabbits—Stub caught his own, the rascal—and that night we all slept sweet and sound, while the water rippled, rippled.

When I wakened in the morning Frazier was already up and out and limned on top of a high dune, surveying about. I joined him.

"Looking for the Peg-Legs?" he said simply. "We'll be good for it now. Do you see 'em?"

The morning was splendidly clear, as after a rain. Clean-cut stretched the desert—fresh, brilliant, beautiful, stretched on, and on, and on, until rimmed by the azure horizon.

And no Peg-Legs were there, nor there, nor there, nor there. A few single uplifts broke; but the horizon rimmed absolutely void of any triple peaks.

'Twas unbelievable, nevertheless.

"Reckon it's well we followed the dog," quoth Frazier.

After breakfast we climbed again, Heff and Stub with us. The heat stratum was shimmering and flowing as of old—so old; and upon its molten surface bobbed and floated no three blackish knobs anywhere.

Sane once more, our canteens full, we turned our backs on the Great God Gold, and with Stub ambling contentedly, now before, now at Heff's heels, we trudged along the river-bed for the out-country.

TWO GIRLS

AS I was walking down the street,
A little girl I chanced to meet.
Her hat was trimmed with ostrich-plumes
Entwined with rhododendron blooms;
Her gloves, they were immaculate
And, I should judge, a perfect fit;
The stylish skirt that matched her waist
Was in the very best of taste;
Her dainty boots, I must concede,
Were very, very smart indeed.
Her face? Well, now, I couldn't say;
Perhaps her veil was in the way.
I didn't notice—and, what's more,
I only thought of what she wore!

As I was walking up the street,
Another girl I chanced to meet.
No hat adorned her lovely hair;
Her dimpled hands and arms were bare;
But heavenly blue was in her eyes—
She seemed an angel from the skies.
The dogwood blossoms in her arms
But added to her many charms;
And, oh, the sunshine of her smile!
Its sweetness made life seem worth while.
Her dress? Well, now, I couldn't say;
I didn't notice, anyway.
I only saw her face—no more;
I never thought of what she wore!

Georgina Billings-King.

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Pirate Wings

by Stephen Chalmers

Author of "Fear," "The Frozen Beauty," "The Castle on the Crag," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED.

WHEN old Jim Thorp, keeper of the Whorl Key Light, was ordered to keep the light dark, because of the war, he obeyed the order; but to him it was as if the eye of England had been put out. His granddaughter, Grace Thorp, took a more philosophical view of things; but she was young and lived in the daytime, relieving the monotony of life at Whorl Key by reveling in the possession of a "mermaid's cave," the existence of which she alone knew.

But when old Jim began "seeing things" at night in the sea below the cliffs; when two strange Americans, who called themselves Mr. Binkie and Mr. Porpus, suddenly appeared at Whorl Key; when Grace found that her mermaid cave was no longer her secret, but had undoubtedly been desecrated by the Binkie-Porpus combination, Grace began to wonder mightily.

And in the mean time the Film Star was drawing nearer and nearer to Whorl Key, bringing the human and inanimate ingredients for "The Great Ten-Reel Million-Dollar Bernstein-Whittaker Production of the Sea and Smuggling." The British navy, through the medium of Lieutenant Olmsted, looked the Film Star over pretty thoroughly—though not thoroughly enough to satisfy "Mother" McCree—and the movie ship, passing muster, finally arrived at Whorl Key, making Grace Thorp's eyes widen with excitement.

Grace saw her grandfather come from the lighthouse cottage and level an old brass telescope at the strange vessel. And then, to her great alarm, a snarling voice right behind her, said:

"So there ye are, lass? I've been watchin' for ye!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A WELCOME OVERCOAT.

GRACE turned quickly and beheld in Snare Burges the most evil-appearing creature she had ever laid maiden eyes upon. His ferret face and weasel eyes were alight with a sensuous satisfaction, and she noted that his bony, prehensile fingers were slightly incurved, as if awaiting his almost uncontrolled will to clutch.

Snare had not seen the steamer. From the high edge of the cliff his eyes had been riveted solely upon the Slot and what he discovered there. The rope-ladder, of which he knew, had been down when he took up his espionage.

It had puzzled him at first to note that it was not made fast in the grotto, that the white maid of his desire was not there in her sirenlike beauty, and that the ladder extended from the top of the opposite cliff to the base of the one on which he crouched.

Then the truth had dawned upon him. The girl was on this side of the chasm, and, turning to explore, he had so found her, her back to him and her shaded eyes scanning the North Sea.

Even when he spoke to her he did not see the ship. His eyes were fixed upon her,

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and only her, marking the silken waves of the dark hair that fell below her waist, gloating over the smooth texture of her slightly tanned skin, reveling in the smooth shapeliness of her half-bare arms and the full curves of her lithe body.

"I don't know you," Grace faltered, her breast heaving in suddenness of alarm. "What do you want?"

The wild appearance of the man terrified her. For the first time in her life she knew the meaning of fear. Her heart beat painfully, yet succeeded in driving no blood to her cheeks until Snare grinned knowingly, and said:

"Eh, lass, y're a heap better dressed 'n last time I saw ye. Come na, give us a kiss!"

For a moment Grace stood as rooted to the salty rock as ever was Lot's wife. Then, as Snare took a step toward her, his face aflame with brute passion, she uttered a gasp of horror and, turning, sped down the face of the rocky steep, leaping from rock to rock with the lightness and sureness of a chamois.

With a curse Snare pursued, but his heavy-booted feet failed the certainty of her bare feet upon the surface of the rock. He slipped and fell into a crevice.

But instantly he was up again, now in the state of rage that succeeds thwarted desire. Recklessly he made one great leap from a high boulder, which brought him almost within clutching distance, but again his iron-shod heels scarred the rock, and again he sprawled his length on the hard, rough surface.

Bruised and bleeding, the pain of his second fall served only to increase his fury. Again he pursued her, rounding the point of the rocks, as she had already done, and following her along the ledge that ran into the Slot. At once he saw the ladder-rung made fast to the jag of rock, and understood how she had crossed the chasm. Now, also, he saw that if she gained that rope-ladder before he overtook her, she would escape.

And this she did—by a mere hand's-breadth. He was reaching out his long arms and prehensile talons to clutch her just as she whipped the rope-ladder from its rocky cleek, and with all her force swung out over the green channel. She made the grotto ledge by the very violence of a leap impelled by terror, and there, holding the ladder tightly in her two hands, she turned and faced her pursuer.

His evil face was distorted with the rage of defeat, but he managed to control himself, and even to force a conciliatory grin.

"What for did ye run, lass?" he asked cunningly. "I wouldn't 'a' hurt ye, not I! I but wanted to ha' word wi' ye. Ye see, lass, I was that amazed t'see a pretty wench on they rocks. 'Twas like ye were a maid come right out o' the sea."

"You were none surprised!" said Grace, her eyes blazing. "You said you saw me before. You are a beast, and I hate you!"

"Aye, aye," said Snare, abandoning subterfuge. "I'll confess I did see ye afore, and was right took wi' ye. And," he added, with a ludicrous yet horrible attempt to be gallant, "the seeing o' such a fair wench would make a angel o' any beast!"

For answer, Grace dropped lightly from the ledge and swung out over mid-channel. For a moment Snare was deceived into the belief that she was actually swinging back to his side.

He even reached out his hands to receive her on his ledge, but the ladder swung only to within five feet of him. Then it swung idly back, its momentum decreasing until it was almost at a standstill over the center of the chasm waters, and with Grace clinging to some upper rungs, her feet on the lowest, clear of the water, and her eyes fixed, now fearlessly, contemptuously, upon Snare Burges.

That rascal stared back at her, then glanced at her feet, but a few inches above the surface of the green water. A thought flashed across his treacherous brain. If he made a quick plunge—

But Grace read the thought as quickly as it was entertained. With a mocking laugh she rapidly ascended two or three rungs of the rope-ladder, and again turned to blaze contempt upon the despicable creature on the ledge. She hardly knew why she stopped and looked back. It was as if she encountered a snake, recoiled from it, and yet was fascinated from a safe distance.

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But all at once, out of the corners of her eyes, she saw something at the mouth of the Slot which caused her to resume the ascent of the rope-ladder with great rapidity and a cry of fear; or was it warning to the inhuman human being on the ledge below?

She had forgotten the steamer, which Snare Burges had been too enrapt to notice. Now into the Slot rolled the steamer's wash—a great, round-backed, silent, velvety roller. Snare followed the direction of that swift glance of hers and pressed himself flat against the face of the rock.

But the wave was remorseless. It swept him like a chip from the ledge and bore him on its breast into the very womb of the Slot. In its passage it clutched at the trailing rope-ladder, and Grace, half-way up, had to cease all upward progress and cling tightly for her own safety.

The wave struck the concave head of the Slot and rebounded upon itself with a roar that was the voice of the terrific recoil. Burges, caught in the burst, was flung back half the length of the channel. Fortunately for him, he did not strike the rock on either side.

The same wave, bursting from the immobile womb of rock, flung high in the air and snatched Grace from the ladder as a leaf in a tempest. She fell right upon the crest of the wave, and was borne with a breathless, fearful rapidity down the center of the Slot.

Even in that moment of peril she saw, before and beneath the great back-washing wave, the face of Snare Burges, open-mouthed and terror-stricken, rising from the depths.

Then the wave closed over him, and Grace herself was borne clear out of the Slot to where it battered itself to a chop in further incoming rollers from the steamer's wash.

She was too experienced a swimmer to attempt battle with the broken seas, merely treading water, with her head lifted high, until the wash subsided. Then, still fanning the sea with her limbs, she turned to see what had become of her undesirable admirer. He was in the act of climbing laboriously on to the ledge on the south side of the chasm; and a more sodden, dejected creature it would be impossible to imagine.

Almost breathless as she was, from her throat came a gurgle of irrepressible laughter. Snare, in the act of pouring a quart of sea-water from one of his boots, looked up, and for the first time, perhaps, seemed to remember her to the exclusion of his own late peril. And as quickly he forgot his narrow escape, encouraged, perhaps by that little laugh.

He came swiftly along the narrow ledge to the point of rock opposite which, in the open sea, she was leisurely treading water. He leaned over the water's edge and extended an inviting hand to her.

"Come on, lass!" said he encouragingly, "swim ye to me, or will I come in an' help ye? Don't be skeart, lass. I'll save ye!"

Grace would have drowned sooner than come within reach of the evil-faced beast. She glanced up the channel, where the waters were now settling to their previous lazy swell. The rope-ladder hung steady, heavy with water, its lowest rung about six inches above the surface. But her limbs were tired. She doubted if she would have strength enough to pull herself up and make the climb. And there was always the chance of this strange, evil man making that plunge which he had previously contemplated.

She said not a word to his invitation, but, turning in the water, swam leisurely away from the Slot and along the open sea, under the front of the Whorl Key cliff.

And here again a surprise awaited her. A boat, filled with men, was rowing into the little landing at the foot of the cliff-path. A man in uniform—a seafaring officer—was at the rudder, and on either side of him sat others in civilian attire.

One of the latter caught sight of the girl, who was apparently swimming from nowhere that was visible save the open sea. He stood up in the boat and stared. He was tall, thin, with a humorous face and jerky manners.

"Good Lord!" he cried. "Look at the mermaid. Oh, if McGurk were here! 'The Siren'—a sea tradition. But, say!—oughtn't we help the lady?"

The boat came to standstill, and all eyes

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looked curiously at the swimming sea-maid. She came steadily on until she passed between the boat and the landing at the foot of the cliff-path. She swam a little faster as the mate, who had charge of the boat, called to know if she wanted help. She reached the landing and drew herself out of the water. Brushing the wet, black hair from her face and ears, she turned and surveyed them curiously.

"Good Golden Rule!" exclaimed Gurney Whittaker. "Look at her! Aphrodite! Aurora! Hebe!"

Grace was quite unconscious of the statuesque beauty of her form as she stood there in the slight garment that clung to her like drapery. But all at once she became aware that she was being admired. With the blood again mantling her cheeks, she fled a little way up the path and took refuge behind a great rock.

"Push her nose ashore," said the mate.

As the men stroked a couple of times and the boat slid up to the rock landing, the mate turned to Gurney Whittaker:

"Here's your chance to work an introduction to the place."

It was Gurney who stepped ashore first. He carried with him an ulster, which he had brought against emergency, and advanced toward the big rock.

"Madam," said he in his best manner to the invisible girl, "your embarrassment commends itself to my sensibilities. But I'm a married man, and"—he tossed the ulster over the rock—"permit me to offer you a temporary accommodation."

"Oh, I'm terribly obliged," said a little voice from the other side of the rock; and presently Grace emerged, wearing the ulster, which sagged at her shoulders, was rather tight across the chest, but covered her so entirely that only the tips of her bare feet were visible under the cloak's trailing length.

"Ah, that's better!" said Gurney, with a smile that set the girl at ease. "Pleased to meet you. Glad to have been of service. In return, perhaps you will pilot us up to the lighthouse. Besides, you ought to have an escort. You might attempt suicide again, and I assure you, my dear young lady, such a calamity would lower the standards of beauty and be detrimental to the progress of art."

Grace stared, wide-eyed, puzzled by this odd person's language, not a little amused by his manner. Suddenly she smiled, then laughed lightly, joyously almost. Here was the adventure tapping at the door of monotony.

"Thank you for the overcoat," said she by way of welcome to the Whorl Key.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TERROR OF THE SWAMP.

BETWEEN dampened body and ardor, when Snare Burges got back to the smugglers' refuge, he felt much in need of a draft from a demijohn containing the home-made article which, many to the contrary, is usually crude. A mental review of the happenings in the Slot added to his home-made excitement, and, as is the curious way of inherent drunkards, the demijohn was applied to, and applied as a remedy for its own evil.

Result: when the rest of the gang returned to the den next morning—being what they were, they could hardly be expected sooner—they found Snare reviving from a night's solitary debauch.

Although the men had seen the Film Star, and had returned as soon as they were sober enough, Snare seemed in no hurry to discuss matters. He sat nursing his knees one moment, his head the next, now glaring at Glimmer Dick, now staring at his booted feet, and cursing.

"What ails ye, Burges?" Glimmer Dick asked unnecessarily, he and the rest having a collective headache of their own. "The ship be here! She been here syne yesternoon. We maun be doin'!"

"Do ye think I be blind?" Burges sneered. "Do ye think I be a fool?"

"Mebbe aye an' mebbe no," said Glimmer, fear of Snare lost in the sense of equality in inebriation. "But ye best be gettin' over to Whorlpool. *He's* there, an' he's been waitin' two weeks."

"For me or the craft?" the leader snarled.

"For the craft, I s'pose," said Glimmer

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Dick; "but now 'tis here, and he looks for you. He said so. We would ha' brought the word last night, as he told us, but—"

"Ye were all lollin' drunk some'eres, and the one as agreed to bring the word was worse'n the rest mebbe!" said Snare with a triumphant jeer.

Glimmer Dick shuffled uneasily, as did the others. The leader got to his feet, reeled, and immediately clapped his hands to his head with a groan. One of the smugglers, a weak-chinned *misérable,* whose downy beard had never known the strong cultivation of a razor, silently picked up the demijohn and handed it to Snare. Burges grabbed it feverishly and tilted it over his mouth. He seemed to take a long draft, then handed back the demijohn with a sharp movement, as if he sought to brace himself.

"Lay low, all of ye!" said he. "Don't budge till ye hear from me."

With that he went away, rather unsteadily, by the goat path at the rear of the cliff. He left the gang standing in a sort of dismayed tableau, the weak-chinned *misérable* still holding the demijohn in his two hands.

Suddenly a score of eyes settled on the big, stone bottle, and Glimmer Dick took charge of it. A moment later he threw it down with a burst of profane rage. Snare had drained the last drop of its contents. Then the disappointed, thirsty *misérables* of the morning after sat down; and silence reigned among them for about an hour.

During this time the man with the downy beard and weak chin stole away from the others once or twice. His errand seemed to take him among the rocks, out of sight of his comrades. About the third time he did this, Glimmer Dick, who had been eyeing him suspiciously, followed. The others, passing a wink, followed Dick.

Behind the rocks the man with the weak chin drew a mutchkin of whisky from his boot, and was in the act of stimulating his jaded nerves, when Glimmer Dick descended upon him with a howl of rage.

"Sh!" cautioned the man, when the mutchkin had been wrenched from his hand and Glimmer was drinking from it. "Keep tha tongue still an' we'll share it!"

But it was too late. The rest of the gang, having heard and seen, swarmed over the rocks and surrounded Snare's lieutenant. There was but little left of the mutchkin the man of forethought had brought from town, just enough to infuriate the smugglers when they realized how comfortably the weak-chinned *misérable* was fortified.

The bottle emptied, and no more than the taste of liquor upon their lips, the whole gang, as with a single impulse, descended upon the wretched creature with the downy, receding chin.

In a fury of alcoholic lees, they beat and kicked him until the man was all but senseless and lay groaning and bleeding among the fragments of the mutchkin that had been smashed over his head. It was an inspiring picture, and they were in that moment an inspiring lot—in a negative way.

Snare, in the mean time, had descended the goat path. His way to the town of Whorlpool lay around the head of the Whorl swamp. At the mouth of the swamp the tide was just beginning to roll in over the flats, but at its head the glistening, slimy mud lay in odorous swelter under the sunlight. Everywhere on this mud leaping spots appeared, like heavy raindrops upon a calm surface. The stikkies were jumping.

The strange creatures and their antics fascinated Burges. They had always done so, somehow, much as an evil thing may fascinate a man who has often dreamed the nightmare of his fate by it. The creatures came slithering out of the loathesome mud, and, for no purpose that any human mind might surmise, leaped high in the air, their fall sinking them once more beneath the soft surface.

Snare shivered and proceeded on a wider detour of the Whorl. But time might mean money on this occasion. Snare was late as it was. *He* would be none too well pleased; and *he* was the golden goose.

At a point farther south, where a rank growth covered the swamp, Burges turned to the right. He might chance the rounding of the Whorl now. The tides had not been high of late, and this part of the swamp had been little inundated. The

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ground should be firm enough, and free from the stikkies.

But Snare's judgment was in error. The waters of the neap tides had settled there and rotted. At the first steps he took from the skirting-path his boots went down almost to the knees, and from the disturbed mud arose a thin cloud of greenish creatures that seemed possessed of less alarm than venomous intent to attack the intruder.

For a moment Snare Burges was paralyzed with fear. He stopped dead-short, afraid to move a step farther lest he sink deeper. He stared down at his boots to see if there was more than a mere surface softness.

But now he did not see the boots.

What riveted his horrified gaze was a number of greenish creatures which had lighted upon his breeches. He had never had, nor desired to have, a close view of the strange insects before, and the fear that possessed his whisky-fired brain seemed to paralyze his nervous system for one eternal moment.

They were about the length of his thumb, shaped like a cross between a grasshopper and a shrimp, and they were possessed of long, glistening antennæ which moved sensitively upon the leather of his boots and the corduroy of his breeches, as if seeking some vulnerable crevice.

At the same time a sharp pain stabbed the back of his hand, and he uttered a cry that came from those depths of a man's soul where horror dwells. On the back of his hand was one of the sickly-hued creatures. Its shapeless head seemed to be burrowing into his flesh, while the antenna stood erect in the hostile angle of a capital V.

With a scream Snare Burges brushed the thing off with his other hand, and floundered, still screaming, back to the path which he had recklessly abandoned. Next instant he was running—running! holding the bitten hand tight in the other, while from his chest burst strange, breathless sounds, like those of a child about to be plunged overhead in cold water for the first time.

Half an hour later, Snare Burges entered a chemist's shop in the town of Whorlpool. He was a bluish-white under his tan; his eyes were filled with an awful dread, and he held out a shaking right hand to the chemist.

"Look—look at it, mister!" he said incoherently. "I bin bit. I bin poisoned. Look! Look at the color of it, an' it's a swellin' up!"

The chemist curiously examined the hand after a glance at Snare's eyes. His first impression had been that the man was suffering from *mania a potu*. But Burges had been bitten—no doubt of that, and bitten badly. The whole back of the hand was inflamed, and where the actual contact of the bite had taken place there was a whitish lump with a blue spot in the center.

"Been in the swamp?" said the chemist, reaching for a bottle and a piece of medicated cotton.

"A-aye, mister. I got caught in the mud, and a—a stikky got me!" Snare fairly yammered.

"You got off easily," said the chemist, bathing the bite with some disinfectant. "There! That should be all right. Nasty things—curious, too!" Again he glanced at Snare's face, particularly his eyes. "I wouldn't advise you to drink any more, and try to keep your mind off your experience. Otherwise—"

But, though no dread possibility of that kind occurred to Snare then or thereafter, the first thing he did when he left the chemist's—much relieved, physically and mentally—was to adjourn to the Sign of the Castaway and absorb several jorums of liquor. He felt the need of them.

The Sign of the Castaway was a waterfront tavern, frequented by longshoremen and North Sea fishermen. It was typical of its kind. Over the front door hung an atrocious painting of a lone mariner adrift on a raft and waving a shirt in distress. Within, there was the usual bar. Opposite it, along the tavern's length, there were little wooden subdivisions; booths in which three sides were benched, with a table in the middle.

It further helped Snare to forget his horror to find the tavern unusually busy and everybody talking about the cinema ship. There were a few soldiers in the place, home

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on furlough, most of them with some evidence of a recent wound.

One of these was a mere lad with his left arm in a sling. He was talking with a rather handsome, gentlemanly-appearing person, who wore a short-clipped, dark mustache, and a Norfolk knickerbocker suit which was jauntily set off by an Alpine hat.

"That's him—the boss of the cinema crowd," said a gossipy longshore loafer at Snare Burges's elbow. "'E didn't come with the ship. 'E's wot you'd call a had-vance hagent. 'Im an' young Lee Gordon seems to have sorter set up to one another. 'Spec mebbe as 'ow 'e's plannin' to give Lee a job with the cinemas. Quite a good 'ero 'e'd make, too, wot with 'is uniform an' 'is wounded harm an' 'is 'andsome looks. Wish Mister Binkie'd give *me* a job. I 'eard 'im say as 'ow they needed soupynumerallies for smugglers an' the like. Bill 'Odges an' me is plannin' to tackle 'im w'en we sees our chanst."

As the friend of Bill Hodges gossiped along, Snare Burges took a good look at Mr. Binkie. It was "*him*," all right, as Snare mentally noted; the same smooth-spoken "gent" who had fixed up the deal to met the ship in the Solway and bring the stuff across. The young soldier with the wounded arm was a stranger to Snare, as, indeed, were all the persons in the tavern, with the exception of this same Mr. Binkie, whom he was here to meet.

Snare ordered another drink and waited. He did not want to approach Mr. Binkie before this crowd. It would give away the acquaintance. Besides, he did not like the king's uniform, when, where, or however it appeared.

He need not have worried about young Gordon, however. The soldier, home from the trenches, convalescent, and on furlough, had merely found life with an astringent maiden aunt—for his parents were dead—somewhat flat after the spice of life with the "boys" in the trenches.

Seeking diversion at the Sign of the Castaway, where there was at least amusing talk about the cinema ship, he had been singled out for conversation by Mr. Binkie for a reason of which, probably, only Mr. Binkie knew.

The lad was clean and a cut above the average. Also, he had just come from the front and was interesting. Furthermore, a seeming close conversation with the young "Tommy" made for a buffer between him and a score of such bores as were represented by Bill 'Odges and his friend.

But Mr. Binkie was quite ready to dispense with Lee Gordon and trench yarns when his eyes met those of Snare Burges, farther along the bar. He waited, still pretending interest in young Gordon, but Snare made no move to come forward. When Binkie understood the smuggler's diffidence, he decided for a move himself. Excusing himself from the soldier, he came straight toward Snare Burges, who quickly averted his gaze, and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Look here, my friend," said Mr. Binkie with a laugh, "I don't know who you are, but you are just the man I'm looking for."

Snare's face cleared of its anxiety, but he looked Binkie straight in the eye and said:

"An' I dunno who you are, or what in hell you want; but if there's any money in it you can talk."

"Did any one ever tell you you are a perfect type of a picture-book smuggler?" said Mr. Binkie, alluding to Snare's ferret face, wild eyes, long tangled hair, and general villainous appearance.

"That's a lie!" said Snare fiercely, quite taken aback.

Binkie laughed.

"I speak from the professional viewpoint—cinema pictures," said he. "Please remark that I said 'picture-book smuggler'."

"Ye might not be so far wrong at that, mister," put in Bill Hodges, seeking an introduction. "It ain't so long since there was lots real smugglin' around 'ere, an' I've seen this chap before. Almost take my 'davy he was one of that crew as was aroun' last night—all strangers to Whorlpool. Ain't that so, Porges?" turning to his crony who had previously talked with Snare.

That Snare's nerves were not yet settled was evident in the swiftness and ferocity of his action. He picked up an empty glass

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from the bar, raised it above his head, and was about to smash it over Bill Hodges's head when Mr. Binkie caught his arm.

"Don't let's have trouble," said he coolly, and to Bill Hodges: "I'll trouble you to keep your oar in your own boat."

"He's tellin' ye lies!" snarled Burges, with a broad west country accent. "I be an honest maan fra Coomberland waay."

"Of course," said Binkie, "and if your friends are anything like you I can use a score of you in the big picture we are making over on the Whorl Key."

At the name of the lighthouse station the young soldier with the slung arm awoke to a livelier interest. He came a step or two nearer.

"Ah'm not denyin' it—we be of the same crew," said Snare. "We be lookin' for a ship to put to sea. Times is hard Coomberland way, an' sailorin' was our trade afoor the war."

"Let's talk," said Binkie.

To the disgust of Bill Hodges and his friend, Mr. Porges, the stranger took Snare Burges into one of the little booths and fell into quiet talk with him.

The soldier with the slung arm began a conversation with the handsome, marble-faced barmaid, but kept one eye on the pair in the alcove. He would have liked to catch the drift of their talk—why, he hardly knew, save as anything connected with the Key, where Grace Thorp lived, had a special interest for him.

"Everything all right?" Binkie was saying to the smuggler in a very casual way.

"Everything be all right," said Snare quietly, "'cept the horse give out an' died. Ye'll have to pay for that horse."

"We'll erect a tombstone, if you like," laughed Binkie. "But," he added seriously, "the cinema company is now on the Key. We're ready to start making the great picture, and—"

"What else is the game?" asked Burges suspiciously.

"Nothing that is any of your business," said Binkie calmly. "From now on your pay will depend on doing as you're told, without you or any of your gang asking questions. You're to pose as smugglers in the play. You're to be what they call supernumeraries. You'll carry bales among rocks and whistle mysteriously, and row boats with muffled oars, and that sort of thing. Are the rest of your men over there?"

"Aye—soberin' up," said Snare with pious solemnity.

"Good! Then let's cross over. Can we get a boat?"

Together they left the Sign of the Castaway. The soldier presently broke off his teasing of the marble-faced barmaid and followed the pair. He was curious about them, somehow suspicious for reasons that he did not analyze till later. Besides, he was going over to the Key himself by the first boat that offered a chance of passage.

Getting a boat for hire was easy, but Snare delayed the departure half an hour, when he was satisfied that the tide was up enough to make the passage of the strait free of the stikky horror, although he knew as well as all Whorlpool that the creatures disappeared the moment there was even half an inch of water on the flats.

It was just when they—he and Mr. Binkie—were about to embark that a young soldier with a slung arm stepped forward and modestly asked the favor of a seat in boat as far as the Key.

"Sorry, my boy," said Mr. Binkie pleasantly enough, "but we can't have visitors over there just yet. We'll be glad to see you all later. Besides, we won't get back to the town to-night, as the company is to live on the ship."

"That don't matter," said the soldier eagerly. "I'll be staying at the lighthouse. Old Thorp is my friend—ever since I remember anything. Besides"—Snare was preparing to push off—"fact is," the soldier blurted as a last resource, "I'm just back from the front, and Grace—old man Thorp's granddaughter—is—is—well, she's my girl!" he concluded defiantly, "and I want to see her!"

Mr. Binkie laughed; so did Mr. Hodges, Mr. Porges, and all the others who had gathered to see the stranger off. Snare Burges grinned, but all at once he stared at young Gordon with a sort of jealous malice. At the same time, Mr. Binkie ceased to laugh at the eager lover.

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"So?" he said with a kindly note. "I've seen her, I think—some girl, too. Jump in!"

Gordon was not slow to take advantage of his luck. He jumped into the boat as bidden, and Snare pushed off. Mr. Binkie waved a hand to the crowd on the slip.

"After all, gentlemen," said he jocularly, "there's nothing like having the king's uniform around when everything's straight and above-board. So long! Don't forget to come over and see us. There's no saying but some of you might be useful to us."

But the young soldier with the slung arm was the only one who detected the note of satire.

CHAPTER X.

THE STAGE IS SET.

GRACE THORP awoke that morning to more than a new day. It was the beginning of a new era in her life. She had slept little from excitement, and also because her grandfather and that curious person from New York had spent the greater part of the night in animated talk by the living-room fireplace.

Yet, for all it had been a wakeful night, and Grace sprang from her bed soon after daybreak with a great joy and expectation of life invigorating her youth. The adventure was on. Monotony was gone.

It was her custom of a morning to peep from the window to determine the day's weather prospects. She was surprised, and not a little further elated, to discover her grandfather and the cinema director walking up and down on the wire-grass plateau, arm in arm, and still, or again, in animated conversation. It was as if those two had not been to bed at all, and were oblivious of time in the discussion of some great affair.

Nevertheless, there was a little anxiety mingled with her elation over this *entente cordiale* which might mean so much to her. Yet, sleepless nights had become a habit of her grandfather. Whatever was in the air, it could not be worse for him than the brooding semi-insanity of his midnight vigils in the tower. She was presently glad to see his mind reoccupied.

Not that she was without an inking of what was being planned. Such little knowledge as she had gained of the seeming enterprise made for her novel delight.

Mr. Whittaker was a cinema picture director. He and his people were planning to make a film play right here on the Whorl Key. It would take weeks and weeks, Mr. Whittaker had said, and Grace Thorp saw, stretching alluringly before her, day following day of distracting novelty lasting from morning until night.

And her life had been *so* empty since the war began and Lee Gordon went away.

Of course, everything depended upon what her grandfather had to say about it, and apparently Mr. Whittaker was doing his best, and succeeding, toward overcoming the old man's scruples and suspicions.

She could not help thinking, however, that Mr. Whittaker himself had few scruples about how he obtained the lightkeeper's good-will and consent. There had been a few things in this connection that puzzled Grace Thorp.

In the first place, when she had come out of the sea on the previous day and accepted the American's ulster to cover her statuesque drapery, he introduced himself and his friends, in the true Gurney manner, as a company of cinema picture-makers who were seeking what he called a "location" for the manufacture of a great masterpiece that was to cost millions and millions of dollars or pounds—she hardly knew which. In fact, Mr. Whittaker so often spoke in terms of millions that it was difficult for a simpler mind always to follow his precise meaning.

That these were cinema people, at once sent her memory flying back to that morning encounter with the mysterious Messrs. Binkie and Porpus. Yet she believed there could hardly be any connection.

The mysterious manner of the coming and going of one party, and the frankness of the coming and the conduct of the other, precluded the probability. And then Mr. Whittaker, as she had led him and his party to the lighthouse, talked as if he had stumbled upon the Whorl Key by accident.

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His delight at the scenic surroundings was boyish; at least, so it seemed to Grace, who knew nothing of directorial and Gurneyesque enthusiasm. It seemed as new to him as if he had never received that cablegram from Mr. Binkie.

"Good Golden Rule, McCree!" he cried to one of the passengers who had come with the boat's crew, and the mate. "Look at it—the color!—the scenic material! Ye gods! — made for our purpose. And this girl, too! The Sea-maid! For a face and a figure like that I'd change the finest scenario ever written to ring her in." He glanced hastily back over his people. "Thank the Lord, the Collamore isn't along. There may be trouble enough if I do it."

Grace vaguely realized that this rapid American was making plans which included her, and somehow she was not displeased. That night when she had seen "Enoch Arden" with Lee Gordon she had dreamed of herself as the much-married "Annie." Which was quite natural. She was young. She was lonely. She had seen cinema pictures. And now she dreamed another dream of the same sort.

Gurney was charming. He solicitously asked how she came to be in the sea—er—fully dressed. Encouraged to talk, she told him; not all, however; just that the steamer's wash had swept her from her rope ladder into the Slot. In her eagerness to conceal one thing she had revealed another.

"Ladder? Slot?" Gurney echoed, and when she told him more and they paused for breath at the top of the cliff he insisted upon seeing the Slot—and the ladder.

She yielded to her own desire to please and interest him. This man had come to her like Destiny, and Destiny was knocking at her very desolate door. She led them to the Slot's edge and showed them the ladder still hanging in mid air of the chasm.

"By the nine gods!" said Gurney. "You might have been drowned or battered to bits against the rock face."

But all the time Whittaker was eyeing the ladder and the opposite cliff and thinking hard.

"Look here, McCree!" he said almost in the same breath. "We could use that rope ladder—stretch it to the other side—the perilous secret passage over which smugglers bring contraband—withdrawing ladder after them — thus baffling revenue spies."

McCree was expected to answer, but he did not at once. The mysterious heavy lead was listening intently, and in the pause there came to the alert ears of the director a sound of heavy snoring somewhere in the rocks behind the opposite cliff.

"Possibly it has been used for that purpose already," said McCree drily.

"Oh, no," said Grace quite earnestly. "I made it myself so I could swing down into a grotto there is below where I often went swimming. It was my secret," she added with a kind of sad simplicity, "but too many people know about it now and—"

"Great!" said Gurney with unnecessary loudness. The snoring still drifted from somewhere and the director looked anxious. "The sea-maid's bower," he went on, almost declamatorily; "Sea-maid pursued by revenue officer, second villain, who seeks to extort information about her father, Heather Bloom, and her lover—handsome young smuggler. She swings into the abyss and to the secret grotto by moonlight (calcium) and vanishes. Revenue officer mystified—foiled! Oh, glory!"

"Collamore," chuckled McCree, foreseeing trouble.

"Well, let's be presenting ourselves at the lighthouse," Gurney went on hastily, for the heavy snoring of the whisky-sodden Snare Burges would not cease. "One thing at a time. It's the curse of the directorial temperament, Miss Thorp," said he as they moved over the wire-grass plateau. "Ideas! Millions of 'em!—each trying to crowd out rest. We all end in the madhouse! Half of us are insane, the other half merely not so adjudged. Now, I'd make a shrewd guess that's your grandfather. Good Golden Rule! Why did I bring a company at all? The place is fair crawling with types!"

Old Thorp had emerged from the lighthouse and was surveying the approaching group with an eye far from amiable and full of suspicion. But as they drew nearer his gaze fell upon his granddaughter with wonder and surprise.

"Grace!" he exclaimed. "What's hap-

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pened? Who are they people? What's that thing you're wearing?"

"I fell into the Slot," said Grace simply, removing the ulster and revealing the wet clothing clinging to her splendid young body. "This gentleman was very kind. He gave me his coat."

"Fell into the Slot!" gasped old Thorp and his aged face became ashen in hue. All at once he stepped forward and gathered the girl into his arms. His voice quavered as he cried: "Oh, my lass! My lass! How often have I warned ye to keep away from that treacherous hole? Grace, my little lass, what if ye had been drowned?"

Grace sought to remind him that she could swim like a mermaid, but it consoled the old man little. Presently with two tears hanging on his cheeks, he turned to Gurney Whittaker and the others as if seeking some further explanation of their share in the matter. Gurney heard the knock, seized Opportunity by the throat and dragged it through the door in a way that astonished Grace into speechlessness.

"We saw her in the water, sir, and gave her all the assistance in our power. Not a word, sir! Any man would have done the same. If you feel you owe us anything, why—"

"Sir," said the old man, "I owe ye more than I can tell you. But how did ye come to be so handy?"

Then Gurney Whittaker explained. The steamer was a vessel chartered for the making of moving pic—cinema pictures, that is—and they were rowing ashore to the place, which seemed to be highly suited for the scenes of a great, ten-reel, million-dollar smuggling drama, when they saw Grace—er—Miss Thorp in the water. That was all.

That was all, but a strange look came over the old man's face during this ready speech. At the end of it his countenance wore a positively menacing scowl.

"This is guv'ment property," said he sullenly. "Besides, I don't want anything to do with smuggling—smuggling's been no joke along this coast. And what's more," he added, "I don't like play-actors or any folks of that sort."

Only Grace knew what was in her grandfather's mind. It was the memory of her mother, his daughter, the beautiful maid who, lonely like herself, had gone to London with the artist, her father, who abandoned both wife and baby, the mother to die and the baby to be returned to the lighthouse and brought up by this embittered old man.

Gurney bowed his head as one stricken with the ignominy of vagabondage.

"I am sorry, sir," he said with an impressive, humble dignity.

It was Grace who came to the rescue. She put her arms about her grandfather's neck and protested.

"Oh, grandpa, you forget!" she said, her cheek against his. "Cinemas aren't like play-acting. They're quite different, and so are the people in them. And—and, grandpa, I'm thinking you're not very grateful. If it hadn't been for this gentleman I—I might have been—drowned!"

She took very good care not to look at anybody—not even her grandfather—when she said this.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Gurney to himself soulfully.

"Mother" McCree turned away with something like a groan and rolled his somber eyes toward the listening heavens.

Old Thorp was stirred. Within him was a battle raging between present gratitude and a past memory; and the suspicion of his old age sat as a very partial referee.

"Well—well—" he said at last and in very uncertain tones, "that does make a difference. But, mind, I'm not saying 'aye' or 'no.' I want to think, and I want to talk to you, sir—I want to talk a good deal to you."

Again Gurney bowed, this time with infinite respect. In his heart he was sorry for the old lightkeeper, and secretly he was ashamed.

"It's a raw deal to put over an old man," Conscience whispered.

"But," retorted the little Imp of Ambition that sits outside a man's conscience, "if you win, he'll never know anything was put across."

"Suppose you don't win?" suggested Caution.

"Then you'll be too busy thinking about your own skin," said Self-Preservation.

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"You see," old man Thorp broke in upon Gurney's reflections, "I've had a power o' trouble in my family first to last, and this war maybe hasn't sweetened my temper none. I'm sorry if I seemed ungrateful. And then they put out my light. That hurt, I tell ye—that hurt!"

"They put out your light?" said Gurney, puzzled.

"Aye," said old Thorp, jerking a thumb up at the tower. "I tended it forty year. 'Twas the apple o' my eye—aye, sir, and 'twas the eye of England—one of them, at least. Now—this war—fighting in the dark—fighting wi' her eyes shut—England's eyes. I tell ye, I don't hold wi't. It isn't what it used to be, sir."

Tears were still trembling in the rheumy old eyes. Gurney Whittaker turned away with a softly uttered bit of profanity. The usually remorseless director was plainly stirred. But he had made his decision. It was no time to dabble with sentiment. Yet to his professional temperament the appeal of it was irresistible. He turned to McCree and the mate, addressing the former mainly.

"You hear that? Put out the old man's light that he tended for forty years. There's an idea in that—'The Eye of England'—shut! The old lightkeeper, descendant of sea-kings, loyal to the core—embittered by policy he doesn't understand. Emissary of the enemy approaches him in secret. Struggle between old love of duty and new bitterness—"

"Gurney," interrupted Mother McCree in the voice of a heavy villain emerging from a Paris sewer, "if you develop any more ideas you'll go off by spontaneous bust!"

Everybody laughed except the old man. He had been listening to Gurney Whittaker. What the director had said had struck his weak spot.

"If your ship's going to lie in the offing overnight," said he simply, "maybe, sir, you could stay and eat a bite with me and Grace and—and I'd like to talk with you."

"Delighted," said Gurney. "Would appreciate the opportunity." He turned to his people and said with significance: "You all had better return aboard till further orders. I'll stay on Mr. Thorp's kindly invitation."

And he did. It was a great night in the life of Grace Thorp. Once or twice she thought of the submarine and Messrs. Binkie and Porpus, and Mr. Binkie's statement that they were connected with cinema pictures, even as this Mr. Whittaker; but she flung caution to the air, as many a woman has done when monotony renders her desperate.

She waited on the two men during supper, at which Gurney wisely kept away from the subject uppermost in his mind. He entertained the aged lightkeeper with war-talk in which his sympathies perfectly coincided with the old coast-guard Briton's. And after supper the trio assembled around the fire and Gurney told them things about cinema pictures that aroused the old man's keen interest.

"It's a kind of play-acting," said he; "and yet it ain't like play-acting. It's the real thing."

This interest became enthusiasm when Gurney outlined the plot of the great ten-reel, million-dollar masterpiece of the sea and smuggling. As was Gurney's way, he acted what he described and took up the larger part of the living-room in doing it.

Grace and her father, their eyes riveted on the man of histrionic talent, kept hitching their chairs back to give the performer more room. Through two and a half hours they watched, fascinated by the unrolling of the dramatic tale that Gurney Whittaker visualized for them as actually happening on and around the Whorl Key and the Slot; and every now and then the old lightkeeper would interrupt to say, his eyes all aglow:

"By thunder! I know just the spot you're talking about. I'll show it to ye to-morrow!"

Gurney did not forget to bring up again the matter of "The Eye of England," and told the lightkeeper how, if that drama—which he outlined briefly—were properly done, it would bring tears to the eyes of millions—millions!

"Aye, aye," said Thorp, "but after all it would be just a cinema story, for if it was me, now, and any missionary—as ye call him—of the enemy came around my light

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trying to buy me to do my country dirt, I'd drop him in the Slot so quick he'd think—he'd think—"

"He'd think he was a plugged nickel," put in Gurney; and while Grace and her grandfather did not understand the joke, Gurney's mirth was so contagious that they laughed, too.

When Grace went to bed the American and her grandfather were still talking. Excited as she was she did not neglect to say her prayers, and on this night she inserted two little extra pleas—one that she might be forgiven that little deception about the supposed rescue, the other that Mr. Whittaker might be allowed to stay on the Key and make cinema pictures.

The morning was the beginning of a more exciting day. When she joined her grandfather and Mr. Whittaker where they were walking and talking arm in arm before the lighthouse, Gurney informed her that it was all settled.

They were going to make the picture and she was to have a part in it, if she would be so obliging as to help, and the steamer's boat had been ashore for orders, and the company would be along after breakfast, bringing the "properties"—the whichwereness of which he explained—and enough provisions for an *al fresco* luncheon on the plateau.

Old Thorp was in clover. There were moments when his granddaughter had little qualms of mistrust, but the lightkeeper was now the first to dispel them.

"Of course, I'll send a report to Tynemouth," he said to her when they were alone, "and let them higher up do as they think fit and proper. But I don't think I'm doing any wrong thing, lass, and if there's anything going on as shouldn't be, why, haven't I got them right here under my eye?"

Later, when the company came ashore, Grace and her grandfather were formally introduced—with much deference on the part of Gurney—to the Thespians. Miss Glory Collamore, who had heard no rumors as yet, fairly swept the sea-maid into her arms and told her she was "perfectly sweet!"

And at that Gurney instructed Miss Collamore to take Grace aboard the Film Star and provide her with a suitable dress, forestalling protest by remarking that the one she was wearing was "somewhat the worse for salt water."

Thus it happened that when Mr. Binkie, Snare Burges and Lee Gordon landed in the rowboat at the north end of the Whorl Key later in the day, they encountered two fashionably dressed beauties, in one of whom the young soldier had difficulty in recognizing his former sweetheart, Grace Thorp.

"Lee! Oh, Lee!—you've come back!" Grace almost screamed as the boat drew in to the shore.

Lee Gordon, swallowing something that may have been amazement, sprang out of the boat and kissed her heartily, much to the sudden embarrassment of the girl, who perhaps realized that a revolution had taken place in her world and that things were not quite as they used to be; also much to the relief of Miss Collamore, who had been somewhat alarmed all day by the distinct leanings of the leading man, Mr. Hayden Talbot, toward Grace Thorp. Miss Collamore was also concerned about certain rumors of changes in the scenario.

But Grace herself was presently the most emotionally stirred person in that group. Her eyes wandered to the other two men in the boat. In one she recognized the wild beast of the rocks who, upon his own admission, had spied upon her maiden dreams in the Slot; and in the other man she recognized the mysterious Mr. Binkie who, with his companion Mr. Porpus, must have seen more than they admitted of the Siren of the Grotto, her secret bower and the means of reaching it.

For a moment she stared at them, while they quietly observed her, Snare with a gleam of brute admiration, Mr. Binkie with a twinkle of amusement.

Then, despite the rich gown that fully clothed her, her face took on a slow, deep crimson. She turned silently and walked away from the group, up the path to the lighthouse and its simple white cottage, leaving Miss Collamore and the young soldier completely mystified.

"Now what happened to her all at

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once!" exclaimed the disappointed soldier-lover.

Mr. Binkie and Snare Burges, for reasons unknown to each other, thought they knew, but said nothing.

And for those similar reasons they were each, unknown to the other, confident that Grace Thorp would not speak of having met either of them before—at least, not without the great provocation that finally unsealed her lips.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SUBMARINE AGAIN.

THAT evening witnessed a sort of reunion between the old lightkeeper, his granddaughter and Lee Gordon, of His Majesty's forces. To Thorp, the lad was something like a son or a grandson. He had known him since his christening some twenty-two years before, at a time when Gordon's parents were both alive and Thorp's beautiful daughter—whom Grace so resembled—had not yet met Folly and Fate in the London artist.

In those days they had all "visited" together, for Gordon's father, who had owned half a fishing fleet which was lost in a storm, had been a distant relation of the lightkeeper's wife. Thus Lee Gordon as a child had known the Whorl Key and its every nook and cranny, before Grace was even able to hold his hand and toddle about with him.

They had grown up together when the pretty child appeared from London. The death of his own parents, through one broken heart succumbing after another to which the disastrous storm had proved fatal, and the tragedy of Grace's mother, together with the equally tragic defection of her father, had drawn the lad closer to the little lass.

They had gone to school together. There he was her champion and *cavalier servante*. Life with his astringent aunt, already referred to, was sour enough to the lad to make his frequent visits to the Whorl Key occasions of joyous holiday. And sometimes on Saturday afternoons the lightkeeper, who loved and trusted the growing youth, allowed Grace to be rowed over to Whorlpool for a visit to the cinema "palace."

It was just about the time the war-cloud burst in Europe that Lee and Grace visited the theater and saw the picture-play, "Enoch Arden."

That was the memorable night. He was twenty, she eighteen.

There was a full moon when they started to row back across the strait to the Key. Half way over Lee hung on his oars and told her of his great decision. He had that day taken the king's shilling and was going to France to "do his bit."

The result of that announcement, coming as it did on top of the emotions of Tennyson's touching love-story, made it necessary for Lee to ship his oars and sit beside Grace in the stern of the boat, which drifted for a while in the moonlight, somewhat high in the bow. That was the night he kissed away her tears and brought to her face a light that he had never seen there before.

Then for days she was happy in her misery, miserable in her happiness. He was going away. He might never return. It seemed to both of them that they had wasted years when they might have understood this new thing that had come to them, and been happy.

Old Thorp had seen them from his light tower that day when Lee, at the end of his training period, came to bid her the momentous farewell. It took place at the boat landing at the north end of the Key. She had refused to go with him to the town, where curious eyes might read their secret.

Manly, erect, square-shouldered in his king's uniform, he had taken her in his arms, there. She had watched the boat with its solitary khaki-clad rower until both disappeared behind the Whorlpool slip, then she had been absent from the lighthouse all day, for Lee Gordon knew no more than her grandfather did about the sea-maid's grotto in the Slot chasm.

There she sobbed out her first great grief.

Now he was back with his left arm in a sling; and such was the shattered nature of his wound that it was possible he might never be allowed to return to the fighting front again.

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"Never mind, lad," said old Thorp, who took many things for granted. "I'm getting old and maybe this war will last longer'n me. They'll surely reward ye with the light after I'm gone, seeing as I've been faithful for forty years. Ye'll be as my son—as ye have been most of your life, and "—with a chuckling glance at Grace—"maybe will be the rest of it."

Neither Grace nor Lee said anything to this. The reunion was not as happy as either the lad or the lass had dreamed it would be. Only old Thorp of the trio by the living-room fireside was unaware of this.

Grace was changed mysteriously; he quite naturally. He was a man in stature and experience. He had seen the grim side of life, and was more reserved in speech, less inclined to boyish buoyancy of spirit.

And Grace?

He could not understand the change in her any more than she did herself. It was hardly the dress, although that added the finishing touch. It was something in herself—something inside her; a barrier had suddenly been raised over which the old frankness could not pass with the old innocent comradery.

She did not speak of him or of herself as of yore. She was abstracted, he noticed, even when the old man leaned forward, his rheumy eyes burning, as the soldier told of charges across No-Man's Land.

"I'm thinking they were a sorry lot when you lads got through with them," said the lightkeeper, referring to a description of routing out some German dugouts. "What d'you think, Grace?"

"Who?" she said with a little start.

Then there was an awkward silence which only old Thorp failed to notice.

Lee somehow attributed the whole fiasco of his return to the cinema business, of which Grace was never tired of talking or hearing. The girl seemed obsessed with the picture idea or was it that she pretended to be, as cover to her new womanly shyness?

It was with a queer heart-sinking that he heard of the proposal to give her a part in the play. Perhaps he was prejudiced, but he had seen a lot of cinema pictures since the night of "Enoch Arden," and in Europe their subject had not always been Tennysonian in tender simplicity.

At first the memory of "Enoch Arden" had predisposed him in favor of the cinema people and their work. In fact he had said to Grace, after they had looked over the mysterious activities of the great Bernstein-Whittaker company, that it would be "fine" if they were going to make a play "just like that."

"Oh," said Grace with a faint access of color, "they're going to make a much better picture than that. It's going to cost—millions!"

Then there had been that languid piece of masculine beauty, Mr. Hayden Talbot, the leading man. To the annoyance of the returned lover—and to the growing rage of Miss Glory Collamore—the handsome "hero" had been at Grace's elbow all day. He had a smooth tongue and a winning manner which threw the wounded soldier-lad into shadowed contrast.

In his heart-sickness Lee had fallen into a silence of which Talbot was quick to take advantage. Then—it was childish and foolish, of course—the young man in khaki had allowed himself to yield to the blandishments of the piqued Miss Collamore, who adroitly took him away from Talbot and Grace—the leading lady herself giving up the petty fight—and she assured him that she knew the difference between real heroes and the stage kind.

While he found himself positively loathing the woman, strangely enough Lee Gordon "played up to her," as Gurney would have put it. He told her how the French girls absolutely adored the British "Tommies," citing a few incidents, whereat Miss Collamore wagged a delicately manicured finger in his face and cried laughingly:

"Oh, naughty! Naughty! I'd hate to be your sweetheart waiting at home."

All of which troubled Grace, deepened her reserve, roused all the self-defensive contrariness of her newly discovered womanhood. All of which infuriated Mr. Talbot, who knew his lady-love's weakness for a uniform. It urged him to more assiduous attention to the lightkeeper's daughter, whom he described in Glory's hearing as "our new leading-lady."

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Oh, it was a heart-sickening comedy, humiliating in its pettiness, to the young soldier, at least. His inner anger had progressed with the day. Then Gurney had made a tactical error. Noting the king's uniform and the slung arm he had promptly developed an idea.

Here was material to hand for a soldier character, wounded, home on furlough, disappointed because he had achieved no distinction other than a shattered arm. He had a vision of the wounded soldier achieving at last unexpected merit by helping to lay the smugglers by the heels.

"By the nine gods!" said Gurney to Lee, "I've half a mind to ring you in on the scenario."

"Well, let the other half of your mind get it straight," Lee retorted with no good grace, "that neither me nor my uniform nor my blighty arm's going to be rung into any blame pictures!"

The only other small cloud that arose upon Gurney's horizon that day concerned Snare Burges and his smugglers.

With a little instruction from Grace the rope ladder had been conveyed across the Slot, its lower end brought up and made fast as a rope bridge across the top of the chasm.

Very shortly thereafter Glimmer Dick and the rest of Snare's gang appeared on the Whorl Key and came under the eye of the old lightkeeper, who immediately demanded their credentials of Mr. Whittaker.

"Oh, they're the crew," said Gurney readily. "Later, they're to play the smugglers."

"They look the part, I grant ye," said Thorp suspiciously, "and as I'm 'sponsible for all that goes on here I'll trouble ye to keep them off the Key till ye have to have them for your play-acting."

"Why, certainly," said Gurney. "You're quite right and they came ashore without orders anyway. Here, you!" he added turning sharply upon Snare and his men, "get back aboard where you belong and stay there till you're sent for."

Glimmer Dick and the other smugglers turned to Snare for advice, evidently none too pleased by their reception. Snare glowered at the director for a moment. Gurney, his back turned to Thorp, closed one eye confidentially.

Without a word Snare turned and, followed by his disgruntled men, went down the cliff-face path to the boat which had been coming and going between the ship and the shore all day. Later, Gurney sent a message aboard to propitiate them with grog.

At the close of the first active day of the cinema company on Whorl Key, Gurney, with the assistant directorship of Mr. Binkie — whose apparent respectability and legitimate business had passed unquestioned—had constructed the rope bridge and an indoor set which, when allowance was made for the fact that it had no front, resembled a cellar decorated with kegs and bales and with a ladder descending at the rear from a trap-door in a supposed roof.

"The smugglers' lair," Gurney explained airily to the lightkeeper, who was as interested as a child; "supposed to open into the channel waters of the Slot."

After sunset all of the cinema people returned aboard the Film Star for the night. It was then that old Thorp, Grace and Lee held their little reunion by the fireplace in the living-room of the lighthouse cottage—the reunion that was, to Grace and Lee, at least, a fiasco that each secretly wished would end in better understanding.

As grandfather's eye was expectantly upon them when they came to say goodnight, both arose to the occasion and exchanged a hasty, embarrassed kiss, like that of children who would fain make-up if they but knew how, without sacrifice of that most stubborn of all emotions—childish pride.

Grace went to her room, and she may have slept, or she may not. Old Thorp had acquired the habit of sleeping on the couch of the living-room, so that he could have easy access to the tower at any hour the spirit moved him and without disturbing his granddaughter. The young soldier was give a shakedown in the kitchen. It was just comfortably near the kitchen fire.

He had slept in that shakedown many a time, and slept soundly, too. But on this night sleep and the soldier could make no truce. His thoughts tormented him, and

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so did his wounded arm for some reason not clear. It had troubled him little for some weeks now.

Perhaps it was the knitting of broken bones; perhaps a change in the weather was impending. In any event midnight still found him writhing mentally and physically, and he decided that anything was better than lying there.

He got up, half-dressed himself and slipped out into the night by the kitchen door which opened on to the plateau behind the lighthouse. He walked westward some distance before he semicircled toward the cliff edge overlooking the North Sea.

He had learned from Grace something of her grandfather's midnight restlessness and had no desire to add his lurking shadow on the Key to those that, real or unreal, were already troubling the old man's mind.

He arrived at the end of the little plateau, at the point where a path through tumbled rocks led to the Slot. Here he sat down and let the cool sea-wind blow about his fevered temples. Looking back it struck him how strangely the Whorl Key looked without a blaze of light streaming from the tip of the formerly white tower and the occasional flash of a seabird darting at the glass panes and away again.

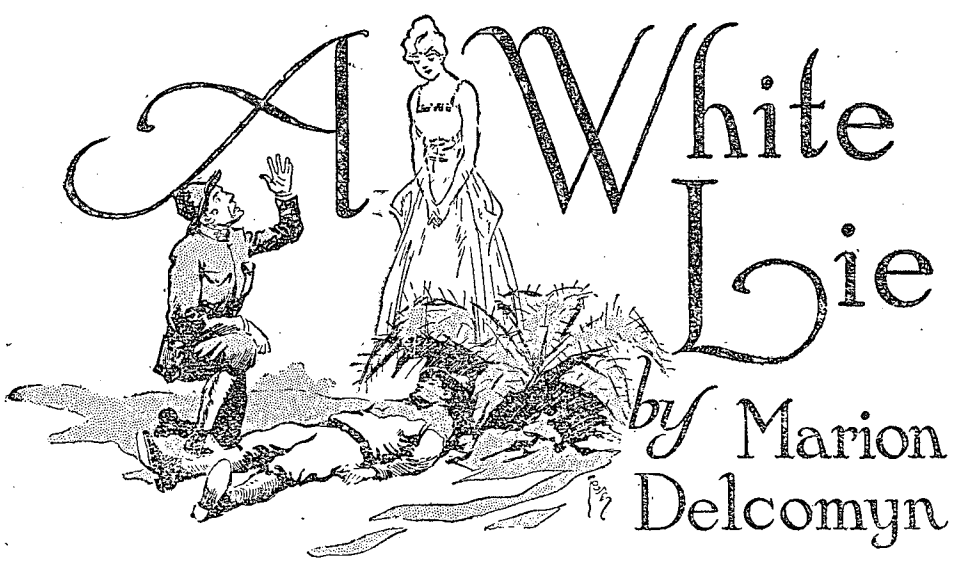
But it was the reigning darkness that drew his eyes quickly to the vicinity of the Film Star. She was carrying no lights save in the portholes of her port side, which lay parallel with the shore. But the light that attracted the soldier's quick eye was something nearer than these and it was moving low on the face of the waters.

It might be a rowboat, and that, at this hour of the night, would have justified Lee's suspicion. But the next thing young Gordon saw awoke him to an alertness that had become instinctive during his life in the trenches.

Across a faint trail of light from one of the ports streaked what looked like an upright pole or the topmast of some sunken—

"Periscope!" the soldier whispered tensely to himself. "By all that's unholy—a submarine—here!"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



I.

"I REPEAT, it's absurd and fantastic of you to throw up a splendid and successful career in order to go down and fight the Mexicans," blustered Herrick, blowing cigar ashes across the desk by which he sat facing his partner, Willard Butler, of the law firm of Butler and Herrick.

Butler merely shrugged his shoulders, without glancing up from a pile of legal-looking documents in front of him.

"If you belonged to one of the regi-

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ments it would be another matter," continued Herrick, warming up to his subject; "but you don't—you never have. In that case you would at least have the excuse of duty, whereas now—enlisting as a private! What in the name of all the saints do you expect to do there, Willard?"

"Fight," said Butler spiritlessly.

"Fight!" snorted Herrick. "Well, all I can say is, you don't look much like a man who is spoiling for a fight. You look more like one who has seen his own ghost. What's wrong with you? Ever since you came back from Los Angeles you have seemed half dead."

"I am," said Butler.

"The answer to that is—" began Herrick. But, before he could finish the sentence, Butler raised his eyes from the papers and looked squarely at his partner.

"Never mind, Tom," he said quietly. "We won't discuss what you think the answer is."

He turned over another of the typed pages and resumed his reading.

"Very well," said Herrick. "It is your own affair, of course." He glanced at Butler a little perplexed, over the top of his cigar. "Lord, the perils that beset the feet of man!" he muttered and got up with half-comic ill-humor.

"One moment, Tom, before you go," and Butler pushed the papers to one side. "I leave to-morrow, but you'll find everything in order so far as the firm's business is concerned. My private affairs are of no consequence to any one but myself," he added.

"Willard, old fellow, why not slip the leash on your tongue? Trouble evaporates, being properly aired," suggested Herrick, again sitting down. "I understand a thing or two, being older, my boy. I know that there are things you want to forget. Something has clogged within you, and you fear the memory. Slip the leash and you will kill that fear."

Butler listened, his eyes on the pile of papers, but shook his head.

"There are other things to be feared," he murmured as if to himself.

Herrick looked at him closely, inviting an explanation. At last he rose and stood a moment quietly watching the younger man.

"It is time for me to go, Willard; I have a case coming up this morning; but I'll see you later."

Silently Butler bent his head and Herrick disappeared into the next room, his own private office.

Thomas Herrick did not again see his friend and partner. His case dragged on till late, and when he returned to the office Butler had left. Nor could he be found at his club or rooms. Early the next morning Herrick learned that his partner had left San Francisco for the border.

II.

THE hotel lounge was full of people, but with only one small section of them are we concerned. This was a group of five persons, who sat chatting over their coffee and cigarettes in an alcove near the door that led into the palm garden.

Young Allan Morrison, a second lieutenant in a cavalry regiment now stationed at the State army-post, was the host of the party. His guests were two brother officers, together with Virginia Duncan, an energetic and vivacious member of the suffrage sisterhood, recently arrived in California to recuperate after several months of platform speaking for the cause, and Mrs. Austin.

It was in honor of the last named lady that Allan Morrison had really given his little dinner. The others were bidden merely to fill in.

Katharine Austin was beyond doubt an extremely beautiful woman, with finely chiseled features, the clearest of clear complexions, and large, expressive hazel eyes. But the most striking thing of all about her was the abundant wealth of auburn-red hair, imparting just that touch of warmth and life that the marble pallor of her skin needed, and crowning it, so to speak, with a sort of burnished glory.

Allan Morrison, indeed, had been heard to speak of it rapturously as a halo. But then he was a very young man, who knew little of women in general or of Kitty Austin in particular, or he would certainly never have invested that lady with the saint's emblem.

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To be sure, the fascinating widow was punctiliously careful of her reputation. She knew nearly every one and went nearly everywhere. No breath of public scandal had ever cast a shadow on her name.

But, for all that, she had driven more good men to the devil than many sirens of less spotless morality have ever succeeded in doing. Shrewd, calculating, callous, one who was out to exploit her admirers for what they could give her, and then, when she had no more use for them, to throw them over, Kitty Austin went her sweet social way utterly indifferent to the fate of her victims.

Young Morrison had heard certain rumors against her in this connection, but he did not believe them. Other people who heard them did believe them, but still accepted her because everybody else did, and because she was an extremely agreeable woman; which, when all is said, is the most common basis of acceptance. Once accepted, it is easy enough to remain so, provided one does nothing openly to outrage the orthodox canons.

Presently, as the party still chatted over their coffee—Allan's adoring eyes all the while on Mrs. Austin—a man in the garb of an army chaplain entered the lounge from the palm garden, and was at once hailed in cordial tones by Captain Hamilton, one of Morrison's two brother officers.

"Ah there, padre! Well met! You're just the man we want."

The clergyman joined the group, and was duly presented to the two ladies. He was a tall, spare man, with thin, ascetic face and sunken eyes, which he fixed with unusual intensity on Mrs. Austin as Morrison introduced him.

"We were talking about apparitions, padre," said Hamilton, on the conclusion of the introductory formalities. "Not exactly a cheerful after-dinner topic, eh? But Shipman here started it by telling us the story of a corporal in his company who swears he saw a medieval warrior, chain-armor and all the rest of it, as large as life, one night when he was doing sentry duty on the Mexican border-line. Now, assuming the man spoke the truth—"

"He did speak the truth," interposed Shipman with conviction. "I mean, the man firmly believed he saw what he told me. His intense manner left no doubt of that."

"Exactly. But believing you see and actually seeing are by no means necessarily the same thing," answered Hamilton. "And if one were expected to swallow all the stories of apparitions that our chaps in the regiments believe, one would require a remarkable capacity."

"Oh! It's easy enough to talk skeptically of these things," retorted Shipman. "But how do you account for them, anyway?"

"That's just the question I was going to ask you, padre," said Hamilton, turning to the chaplain. "A man of your profession should be more *au fait* with spiritual phenomena than we of the laity. What do *you* say about it?"

"I beg your pardon," replied the clergyman abstractedly. His eyes, and apparently his thoughts also, were fixed at the moment on Mrs. Austin; so that he hadn't quite caught the inquiry.

Hamilton repeated it. The other paused for a few moments before answering. His brows were knit in reflection.

"If you had asked me that a year ago, Hamilton, I should have put every one of these phenomena down to overstrained nerves. But now—well, in view of a personal experience of my own, I confess I am not disposed to dismiss the matter quite so lightly."

"Eh? A personal experience of your own? That's just what we want," cried Hamilton. "Tell us all about it, padre."

"Yes, do—please," chimed in Miss Duncan.

By this time all five pairs of eyes were turned toward the chaplain, into whose face had come a curious expression such as the French would call *exaltée*—an expression familiar to those who had heard him in the pulpit when he felt he had a message to convey and was carried away by his religious enthusiasm in the delivery of it. To see him with that look on his face was to be drawn toward him as toward a magnet.

And so it was now. Even Kitty Austin,

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the most unemotional of worldlings, fixed her eyes on him in rapt attention.

"Probably some people would say," he began, "that I ought not to tell you what I am going to relate, seeing it happened in the course of my professional ministrations. But, in the interests of truth, the story may have some value; and, if I avoid mentioning names, it can surely do no harm. Therefore, I think I am justified in letting you hear it.

"It was when I was attached to one of the infantry regiments sent into Mexico. There was a man in the regiment—a private; let's call him Brown—of whom, at one time or another, I saw a good deal. He had enlisted when the trouble with Mexico broke out, but obviously he was not of the class from which private soldiers ordinarily are recruited. No one could fail to see that he was a gentleman. But the most noticeable thing about him was his complete apathy, his entire lack of interest in life, his utter and patient indifference to what he did or what became of him.

"Not, mind you, that he was a bad or incompetent soldier, a laggard, or a shirker or anything of that sort. He did all he had to do thoroughly enough, but his doing of it was just mechanical—not a scintilla of zest or life in it. You could see what it was. He was simply past minding. His existence had sunk to that dead level at which nothing matters, neither life, death, nor anything else. In fact, the poor fellow was, to all intents and purposes, numb. And his numbness was the numbness of a broken heart.

"The more I saw of him the more I was sure of that. And I used to talk to him, in the hope of drawing him out and inducing him to confide in me, for I felt that it might ease him a bit to get his troubles off his mind.

"But all my well-meant overtures were in vain. Always perfectly polite, he would discourse with well-bred ease on any impersonal topic, but about himself or his past never a word would he say. To this day I don't even know his real name, for the name under which he had enlisted was obviously not his own.

"I don't know how it was; I am not naturally an inquisitive person. When a man prefers not to talk about himself or his affairs, I am usually content to leave it at that. But here it was different. The man and the mystery of him—especially the nature of the trouble that had broken him—these things somehow obsessed me. I was filled with a lively curiosity to find out, such as I have never felt about any other man before or since. And in a most strange way my curiosity was destined, in some measure, to be gratified.

"One night the Mexicans started shooting up our camp while I was talking to the men. Presently somebody came running for me to go to one of our fellows who had been badly wounded. I found myself kneeling near a clump of bushes beside Brown. He was horribly mangled, poor chap, and fast relapsing into unconsciousness. I was about to utter a few last words of consolation, when I looked up and saw, to my intense amazement, a woman.

"She stood on the other side of the prostrate man, looking down at him, so near to me that I could have put out my hand and touched her—a woman in evening dress, tall, erect, dazzling white of skin, strangely beautiful, only it was the soulless beauty of marble rather than of living womanhood; and the cold pallor of her face struck all the colder by contrast with the great masses of copper-red hair, wonderful, shining hair, that surmounted it.

"I was still staring at her in speechless amazement when the dying man opened his eyes; and a passionate horror of her leaped into them as he saw the woman.

"'Take her away!' he cried. 'Take her away to the hell where she has driven me!'

"The woman covered her face with her hands and—the next minute I was alone with a dead man; and there was no woman."

The chaplain paused, still looking straight before him, with the same rapt expression that his face had worn throughout the narrative. Then he went on:

"But perhaps the strangest feature of my story is yet to be told. After my return to San Francisco I met a man who believed he could identify Brown from my

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account of him, though he would not disclose Brown's real name, being under pledge of secrecy never to do so.

"But he did tell me something of the poor fellow's history; among other things, how he had been ruined and broken by a heartless, rapacious woman, and his description of that woman tallied exactly with the apparition I saw that night.

"Moreover—which is the really extraordinary thing about it—it would seem that what I saw can have been no ghost of the dead, but an apparition of the living; for my informant assured me that the woman is still alive. If that is so"—the speaker's voice was solemn—"I can only say, may God in His mercy bring her to a better mind and save her, while there is yet time, from the awful doom that the man whom she had ruined called down on her with his dying breath."

Now, for the first time since he had begun his story, the clergyman looked straight at Katharine Austin. He saw in her eyes the plain revelation of a guilty terror.

Almost immediately afterward she rose and took her leave. Allan Morrison escorted her to the hotel entrance and saw her into a taxi, but soon returned to his guests, looking moody and preoccupied.

It was not only that Kitty had, almost bruskly, refused his offer to see her home. There were other things that perplexed him. And so it was with the rest of the party.

An odd sense of embarrassment had fallen on them all, resulting in spasms of forced conversation, punctuated by gaps of awkward silence. Every one was thinking things. Every one was trying to make believe that he was not thinking them.

When, to their general relief, the little party broke up, Hamilton lingered behind to have a word with the chaplain.

"I say, padre," he remarked, "that was a most extraordinary experience of yours. It was Kitty Austin you saw that night, of course—"

"Hamilton," interposed the other, "I can trust you, I know. So you shall have the plain truth. Brown, poor chap, saw an apparition of a woman, or thought he did, and screamed out just as I said. But I saw no one. When you started talking about apparitions, an idea suddenly crossed my mind; and out of that idea, coupled with what I know of Mrs. Austin, the imaginary ending of my otherwise true story grew and shaped itself."

"Eh?" ejaculated Hamilton in blank astonishment. "You saw no apparition! My dear fellow, what on earth was your object in saying that you did?"

"To save a boy's career, and—perhaps also—who knows?—a woman's soul."

THE GREAT LAKES

FOR your long black wharfs I love you,
For your oily harbor smells,
For your peaked schooners reeling in your fickle, dancing breeze;
For your sky that's gray above you,
For your sullen, warning bells,
For your shipping and your smoky ports I love you, Inland Seas!

For your jeweled, golden beaches,
For your combers, running white,
For your vivid, sunshine islands with their nodding cedar-trees;
For your mystic northern reaches,
For your star-reflecting night,
For your bright, alluring vastitudes I love you, Inland Seas!

For your chilly reefs of sadness,
For your passions in the night,
For your angry open waters and the silence of your lees;
For your morning smile of gladness,
For your tenderness and might,
For your faithful human fellowship I love you, Inland Seas!

K. W. Detzer.

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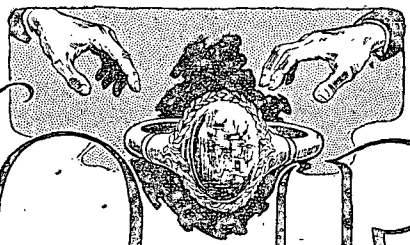
The Green Opal Ring



by El Comancho

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED.

HENRY M. STONE was never more astonished in his life than when, on his way to New York on some railroad corporation law business, a young lady reached out from the window of a west-bound train halted opposite his own in the Seattle train-shed and laid in his hand a green opal ring, with the request that he wear it and meet her at the Twenty-Third Street station of the New York subway at three o'clock on the seventh of June.

He had good cause to wish he hadn't taken the thing, for persistent efforts were made to get it away from him, one of which finally succeeded after he reached New York. He called in Sullivan, a detective, who thought Red Liz, the Come On, might have a hand in it; and Jimmy the Fox, a stool pigeon, promised to do his best to get it back if Stone would only promise to give him a bit of "cush" for his own.

This much of the story is told by Stone himself. Meanwhile the narrative goes back to tell how, in the late nineties, one L. E. Roy overreached his dead partner, Jean Bernard, and switched one mine for another, so that the widow is not as rich as she ought to be. Her daughter Nan grows up to become engaged to George Meldrum, employed by Roy, whom they all trust. Opening an old trunk in the garret of the Bernard home, two brilliant but forgotten opal rings are discovered and a location notice for a mine, which causes Meldrum to apeal in great excitement to Mrs. Bernard: "Do you know anything about it? What's the answer?"

CHAPTER IX.

THE SEVENTH OF JUNE.

JIMMY'S story had thrown a new light on matters entirely.

If I kept my agreement with the street rat I must wait until after Jimmy had talked with Sullivan and then let the officer broach the subject before we could follow Jimmy's tip and go after the ring, now apparently in the possession of the fence Levi, whoever he might be.

If Jimmy's story was true, who were the two women that we had been after? Who was the man with whom they had gone away? If these people were crooks, how did it come that a fine yacht was placed at their disposal?

Why had the women bought tickets for Boston and then left the train at New London, less than half-way from New York to Boston? Why had they gone to such a desolate, out-of-the-way place as Cape Cod? What kind of a ring was it that had been so near like mine that it had deceived both the keen-eyed Jimmy and the woman detective who had seen and handled it?

If this ring was not mine, and Jimmy seemed to know positively that it was not, then to whom did it belong and how did it come to be so nearly like mine?

I had plenty of things to think about, and the more I thought and tried to unravel the mystery, the more tangled everything became.

My phone rang, and I found Sullivan on the wire.

"That you, Mr. Stone?"

"Yes, Sullivan, what is it?"

"Well, we've heard from the Cape. Those people landed on the east shore and went to a deserted shack among the sand-

This story began in The Argosy for October 20.

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dunes, then they crossed the Cape to the bay side and hired a fisherman to take 'em over to Boston in his sail-boat. They are in Boston some place now as far as we know and the drag-net is out. We'll probably have 'em before morning, unless they've left before we get wise.

"We are watching the house here, too, so if we miss 'em up north we'll get 'em when they come back. They left everything O. K. in the flat and evidently don't expect to stay away long. Wait a minute.

"There's somebody in the front office waiting to see me. I'll call you again when I get anything new. Good-by."

Evidently Jimmy had not seen Sullivan yet and clearly we were just as far from solving the identity of the mysterious women as ever.

My head was in a whirl with the conflicting clues; I could not make head or tail of the whole business, so I went out to lunch, trusting that something would soon turn up to solve the whole uncanny business.

I was back at my room in the evening with a magazine, reading and trying to forget the mystery when the telephone rang again.

It was Sullivan and he had seen Jimmy.

He told me over the wire what Jimmy had already told me several hours before, so I was now at liberty to talk things over from the new angle.

I agreed then to meet Sullivan on Twenty-Third Street in half an hour and accompany him to Levi's place, where he proposed to clamp the screws down on the old fence and make him give up the ring, for Sullivan had confidence in Jimmy and knew that the street rat was telling the truth, so far as he knew and understood it, at least.

I called a taxi and went to Twenty-Third Street and Sixth Avenue, the place where I was to meet Sullivan.

It was about the last place in the city one would expect trouble to happen. A great many people were passing, for it was still early in the evening and the corner was a glare of light.

I stood next to the curb with my back to the street, out of the way of the crowd that streamed by, and I was watching closely for the burly figure of the big officer.

I heard a taxicab grate along the curb as the machine came to a stop behind me, but did not turn my head as the cabs were thick enough along all the curbs.

The next instant, without any warning whatever, I was jerked violently from the rear and fell flat on my back—inside the taxi.

Two men and a woman who were in the cab dragged me on in and shut the door before I could make a move and the cab started toward Broadway without regard to the speed laws.

Of course I struggled to defend myself as best I could when I recovered from my surprise, but I was on my back on the floor of the cab with two burly men and a woman pinning me down, so I was about as helpless as a turtle on his back in the sand, and the only result of my struggles was to bring the blue steel barrel of a pistol within an inch of my nose, and back of it a husky voice said: "Keep quiet, youse."

As we flashed by a street light I caught a glimpse of the woman's face—it was Red Liz, the Come-on.

The cab continued to travel at high-speed for a considerable time, slowing down now and then and stopping two or three times for a few seconds when traffic interfered, but mostly keeping up a rapid pace.

I could not see anything from my position, except once or twice, when I caught a momentary glimpse of lights in the windows high up on the side of some office building as we rushed by.

I could not tell, with any degree of certainty now, in what direction we were going, nor could I guess why I had been so unceremoniously abducted.

After what seemed to me to be an hour of furious traveling, but what was in reality probably not more than five or ten minutes, we stopped on a quiet side street, and I was pulled to a sitting posture on the cab floor with my arms twisted back and upward until I could not make a move without causing intense pain in my shoulders.

A bandage was quickly fastened over my eyes and then the voice of the woman—Red Liz—said quietly: "We do not want to

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hurt you in any way, Mr. Stone, nor will you lose any of your valuables. It is necessary to detain you for a few days, which I dare say may cause you some inconvenience in a business way, but that will not be serious. I merely want to warn you that we will not tolerate any noise of any kind or any resistance on your part.

"If you will come with us quietly and peaceably I will give you my word that you will not be hurt and that you will be treated well and released as soon as we can safely let you go. If you resist or make any kind of an outcry or cause any disturbance whatever I will not be responsible for anything that may happen to you—even to sudden death. What do you say?"

What could I say? I was helpless and hopelessly outnumbered. I knew that these thugs would, in all probability, do just what Red Liz said they would, for already I had been slugged while in her company. It was very evident they now had some object in detaining me and that it was clearly worth taking big risks for, that was plain on the face of things.

"Do you promise to go with us quietly?" the woman continued after a momentary pause.

"I don't see how I can do anything else very well under the circumstances, even if I do not value your word to any great extent, Miss Denton," I replied with sarcastic emphasis on the last word.

The woman chuckled, a satisfied, purring, catlike little chuckle as she said: "Very well, Mr. Stone, we will accept your word—and be ready to act if you break it."

We all left the cab then, my captors throwing a shawl over my head and shoulders, and one man walking on each side of me, still holding my arms in their helpless attitude so that I was forced to lean forward to walk.

We crossed a smooth surface, evidently the sidewalk, and ascended a flight of steps.

A door was unlocked, we entered and the door was locked behind us, then we went forward, up more stairs, along a passage of some kind, up another flight of stairs and presently stopped at another door, which was unlocked, and we entered a room, closing the door behind us.

I heard a match scratch, followed by the "plop" of a gas-jet set burning.

Then the bandage was taken from my eyes and, as soon as I could see in the glare, I found myself alone in a room and heard the key turn in the lock of the door directly behind me.

I looked about and took stock of my surroundings.

The room was furnished with cheap, worn furniture. There was a bed, dresser, several chairs, a tall, old-fashioned wardrobe, and the usual pictures, carpet and tawdry lace curtains of the cheap rooming-house.

I stepped to the window. The sash was fastened down with stout nails driven into the casing, and wooden shutters were closed and nailed shut on the outside.

There was little chance of escape that way without tools, and from the street noises that filtered in I judged I must be on the third or fourth floor at least.

The house had once been a good residence, for the casings, doors and all the inside woodwork were of oak, and the ceiling was at least twelve feet above the floor.

An old-fashioned fireplace, now containing a gas log with a marble mantel-shelf over it, occupied the center of one side wall.

The wardrobe held quite an assortment of cheap, flashy woman's apparel, and the dresser-top was covered with a litter of cosmetics, face-powders, hairpins, manicure set and a pin-cushion, in which three or four cheap pieces of jewelry were thrust haphazard.

In an alcove, which had evidently once been a closet, there was a small gas-stove, a few dishes, running water and two or three shelves fairly-well filled with an assorted lot of provisions.

Clearly, this was a woman's room in some cheap rooming-house that gave "light housekeeping" privileges as one of its inducements for tenants.

I might be worse off, for the quarters were comfortable enough in a way and there was food on hand to last for several days. I could do my own cooking, for I have camped out a great deal and am a fairly good cook of a rough-and-ready sort.

If the householder returned and found

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me there would likely be some complications, I thought, for the average woman living alone is not, so far as my knowledge runs, particularly anxious to come home and find a perfectly strange man in possession of her goods and chattels. It was, however, in all probability, the domicil of Red Liz who had, if the signs were right, no doubt vacated temporarily in my favor and she would likely not be back until it was time for me to leave.

I dismissed the matter without further argument; if I had to remain a prisoner here I might as well make the best of it and not try to cross any bridges until I came to them at least.

I found, among other things on the dresser, a package of cigarettes and, while I do not often smoke, I took one and lit it as a nerve tonic, but it was abominably perfumed and I threw it away after the first nauseating puff.

There was absolutely nothing to do and there was not a sound in the house to indicate that it had any other occupants.

I paced up and down the floor, thinking over the queer things that had happened to me lately, until I chanced to spy a paper-backed novel behind some cheap ornaments on the mantel.

I got the book and opened it. It was one of those lurid love stories by Mrs. Somebody-or-Other, with a prince, a villain, a working girl and a poor but honest lover, together with peasants, villagers, etc., for characters, a thrashy mess, but something to help while away the time.

I read until I was sleepy and then went to bed without removing my clothing.

Nothing happened that night nor for the three days following.

I was in solitary confinement that was growing very monotonous, to say the least, for I had nothing to do but eat and sleep. I could not even smoke or read, for there were no other books in the apartment, and I had followed the fortunes of the poor working girl through some thirty or forty chapters of heart-rending trials to where she "lived happily ever after."

I had about made up my mind to end my enforced stay in this lady's apartment, even if I had to burn the place down to do it when, just about dusk, a key suddenly grated in the lock, the door opened and a young woman entered the room.

She closed the door and then stood beside it, pulling off her gloves.

"Welcome to our poor quarters, such as they are, madam," I said, by way of opening a conversation.

The girl had not noticed me before in the semigloom.

Now she promptly screamed, whirled to face me and with staring, owl-like eyes, said in a low, wondering way: "Wa-t-t'-'ell! Who are you and how'd you get in here?"

She was not Red Liz.

It was very evident that I was an unbidden guest.

"I wish you could tell me the answer to that riddle, my dear madam—or miss—" I answered, "for I am free to confess that I can throw very little light on the question myself."

"Light the gas," she said, still standing with her back to the door.

I stepped over to the gas-jet to do as she asked. As soon as my back was turned she jerked the door open, dashed out and slammed and locked the door behind her!

I suspected from her actions that she was disinclined to take me at my face-value. Thinking it over, I concluded that something would probably happen before very long.

The young lady had found a strange man locked in her room and it was evident that this fact did not fit in with her scheme of life—so she had gone away. I felt, however, that she would soon return.

I had not long to wait. In a few moments I heard voices and footsteps outside, the key was turned in the lock, then the door was flung violently open and I found myself facing a wicked-looking gun in the hands of Jimmy the Fox!

We stood staring at each other for a moment, then Jimmy lowered the gun and advanced slowly, wonderingly, toward me, saying: "Well—now—wouldn't dat git yer goat? It's Mr. Stone!"

The girl advanced behind him. Jimmy came close to me, then said to the girl: "It's all right; he's a pal o' mine, but how he got here gits my nanny."

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The girl appeared mollified, and I explained as briefly as I could what had happened. Jimmy listened until I was through.

"So dat's de way dey pull it, eh? Say, Mr. Stone, Sul has been combin' de hay f'r you ever since you flew de coop an' I been wavin' me lamps around some, too! Not'n' doin'—you're gone! An' here Red Liz an' her gang box you up an' leave you on de shippin' platform wit'out a scratch; 'n' right under our nose, too! Wouldn't dat git youse bugs?"

Then Jimmy introduced "his skoit, Mag," and by comparing notes we found that Red Liz had brazenly borrowed Mag's apartment and placed it at my disposal while its rightful owner was away on a trip to Jersey City—on business not stated.

Red Liz had forgotten to tell Mag anything about it evidently; therefore, the young woman had very naturally been considerably surprised to find me there to welcome her home.

It was plain enough. I had been kidnaped by the Red Liz gang for some reason or other and locked up here alone, Red Liz knowing that the girl, Mag, would return sooner or later and thus, in time, release me.

Jimmy then rapidly sketched, in his picturesque way, how Sullivan, mystified by my disappearance, had thrown out the dragnet to locate me, suspecting that something beyond my control had happened to keep me out of sight.

Jimmy was running on about the Cape Cod-Boston search for the women, telling me how all traces of them had been lost in the Hub several days before, when I suddenly remembered a certain engagement I had.

"What day is this, Jimmy?" I asked.

"T'oisday," he answered.

"Yes, I know it is Thursday, but what day of the month is it?"

"De 7th o' Chune."

The 7th of June! That was the day the girl had told me to meet her in New York when she had given me the ring in Spokane—three in the afternoon of June 7 at the Twenty-Third Street entrance to the subway!

I looked at my watch, it was now nearly eight o'clock in the evening! I had missed my date! My chance of solving the mystery of the green opal ring had gone glimmering with my failure to be at the appointed place at the appointed time!

I did not know the name of the young lady who had given the ring to me and I did not know where to look for her now, so the mystery would likely always remain a mystery!

CHAPTER X.

VILLAINY REVEALED.

MRS. BERNARD took the wrinkled, stained and time-yellowed document. She put her glasses on and slowly read it over.

"This is the paper your father brought home when he came in from his first mining trip," she explained. "That was in the fall of 1898, when Nan was three years old.

"I remember it very distinctly. He brought home these green stones, together with the sets that are in that old opal jewelry of mine. He had the opals cut and the jewelry made up for my Christmas present that winter.

"Those rings were made and given to your father by M. Peraud the same winter, but some time after Christmas—in March I think it was. M. Peraud brought the rings himself and gave them to your father one evening just after dinner.

"I was holding Nan in my lap at the time and she played with the two green rings and went to sleep with the smaller one, which her father said should be hers, in her hand. I put her to bed and had considerable difficulty getting the ring away from her, for she clutched it tightly even in her sleep.

"When I did get it away I put it in the tin box on top of this paper, which your father had given me only shortly before, telling me at the time to put it in the box; and he also told me then that if the house should ever catch fire I was to be sure to save two things besides myself, these were Nan and that old tin box.

"Yes, I am sure this is the paper. I remember he took it some place, to the re-

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corder's office, I think it was, and when he came back that evening he gave it to me to put away for him. I am certain of that—perhaps Mr. Roy remembers it also."

"Um-m-m. I think if I were you I would not mention it to Roy just yet, mother," said Meldrum, "and if you don't mind I'll keep it for you a little while as I'd like to compare it with the notice of location in the record books, may I?"

"Certainly, son," replied Mrs. Bernard. "Whatever you think is right; I know little about such things, and if you think it should be investigated I am perfectly willing, for I know you have Nan's welfare at heart and would not do anything that is not right."

"Very well, mother, just leave it to me and do not mention it to Roy or any one else for a few days."

"What do you think, is there anything wrong, dear?" asked Nan anxiously as Meldrum folded the old paper and put it away in his wallet.

"I don't know yet, sweetheart; it does not look just right to me and, as I see it now, I am very much afraid that we will find something radically wrong when I compare this location notice with the records. I really wish I knew just what I am afraid of."

"Well, let us forget it for to-night at least. Come, I will play and sing 'The Knights of Old' for you, come!"

She took his hand and they went romping away to the piano, where she played and sang his favorite song, her sweet voice filling the room with melody.

But Meldrum heard it only as a background for his thoughts; he was trying to make two and two make four and it would not figure out right at all.

The LeRoi claim notice was dated, as he well knew, April 15, 1899, and the description of the ground and the lines that bounded the claim ran, as he remembered it, exactly the same as this old Nan claim location notice he had just read. He racked his memory to recall the exact language of the LeRoi notice and it seemed to be very like this old Nan notice as he recalled it, except that this one read Nan where the other read LeRoi and Roy's name was signed to it as locator, with Bernard's for witness, where Bernard's name as locator and Jack Mitchell's name as witness was signed to this old notice he had just found, and it was plainly dated May 1, 1898, and that was a year prior to the LeRoi location notice!

Bernard had been killed in the spring of 1899, about a month after he and Roy began work that year, if Roy's story was true.

But was it true? What if Roy had murdered Bernard and then stolen the claim?

Would this old paper prove something like that when he followed it up? Would he find that Roy had been posing as a friend all these years when in reality Bernard had met death at his hands?

He mused over the case as he sat there, hearing Nan's voice and the music only subconsciously, for his active brain, trained in matters pertaining to the mining business, was ranging the past for a clue that would straighten out this strangely muddled state of affairs.

Without comparing the old notice with the record books he could not be sure that anything was wrong. Perhaps his suspicions were chimerical and based on a tricky memory, for he had read both the Nan and LeRoi notices many times in the books at the mine office, where the old engineer, Wilson, had written them years ago, having copied them from the records so he would have the legal description of claim lines and boundaries to refer to at any time.

He had never seen any copy of either location notice written by Bernard—he was sure of that.

"Likely as not," thought Meldrum, "it will prove to be all right and I have merely confused things in my mind by reading over this old, faded original notice; well, to-morrow, I will check it up with the books and know."

He stood beside Nan at the piano and sang with her, his fine base voice blending nicely with hers. For an hour they enjoyed their own music, but all the time names and dates kept flashing across Meldrum's mental screen; he could see the figures blend and run together, but they would not straighten themselves out into clear, positive combinations.

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Late in the evening he parted with his sweetheart and went slowly along the streets toward his own room, turning the problem of the different names and dates over in his mind, trying to make them fit two different claim notices.

He fell asleep with the riddle as far from solution as ever and thought of it again the first thing when he awoke the next morning.

After breakfast he went directly to the recorder's office, where he asked to see the records of both the claims.

He compared the old paper with the record of the Nan claim as it had been written in the book years ago.

The book description read entirely different from the old document he held in his hand, for in the book the boundary lines turned north from the second claim-stake, while in Bernard's old notice they turned south, which corresponded to the actual lay of the LeRoi ground as he knew it.

After studying and comparing the two Nan descriptions carefully and finding that they did not agree, he turned to the page where the LeRoi record was written.

He read this in the book and found it was an exact, word-for-word copy of the old original location notice written by Bernard, except that the word "Nan" on the old document read "LeRoi" in the book, and that the names in the book were those of Roy as claimant and Bernard as witness; whereas on the old original notice Bernard's name appeared as claimant and Jack Mitchell's as witness. It looked very suspicious to say the least!

Suddenly his eye caught the location date line of the LeRoi claim as it was written in the book and it stood out like a blaze of fire, for it was May 1, 1898! That was the same as the date of location in the old notice he held in his hand!

He turned back to the page of the book where the Nan claim was recorded and looked at the location date line there; it was April 15, 1899—a year later! And the Nan he knew had in reality been discovered and located by Bernard a year before Roy had located the LeRoi!

Then he made another discovery; as the records were spread in the book it was the LeRoi claim that carried a discovery date—April 28, 1898—and the Nan claim showed no record of discovery date at all! And Bernard, who had been the original discoverer of the lode, a year before Roy had staked his claim at all, had located his own claim and named it the Nan; this was well known to many people.

He reread the old document in his hand again. "Notice of location of the Nan lode claim, discovered April 28, 1898. Located May 1, 1898. Notice is hereby given that the undersigned," *et cetera*. The regular printed form of location notice followed, and it was signed with Bernard's name and witnessed by Jack Mitchell.

He now reread the LeRoi record in the book again. "Notice of location of the LeRoi lode claim discovered April 28, 1898. Located May 1, 1898. Notice is hereby given," *et cetera*. It was exactly the same, but it was the LeRoi claim and in Roy's name and Bernard was the witness!

Then he turned back again to the Nan record, spread on another page nearer the front of the book and reread it. "Notice of location of the Nan lode claim discovered (blank) 189—. Located April 15, 1899. Notice is hereby given," *et cetera*, and at the bottom was Bernard's name as claimant and Mitchell's as witness!

It was as clear as the noonday sun!

Some one had changed the record, but had overlooked changing the discovery date lines! The Nan claim as originally located by Bernard was the LeRoi mine of to-day, owned by Roy!

Bernard was reported dead. Roy had been with him when he was last seen, years ago; Roy had brought the news of Bernard's death himself; nobody but Roy really knew anything about what had happened between the time he and Bernard had left Spokane together and the date that Roy had returned alone. And here was damning evidence against him in the shape of changed mining location notices, which switched descriptions of the two claims originally staked by these two men so that the rich one now belonged to Roy, while the poor claim was in Bernard's, the dead man's, name!

And clearly Bernard, the original discoverer of the vein, had discovered, staked

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and recorded the rich claim a year before Roy had located his!

Meldrum tilted the book up so the light glinted across the page; the dulled surface of the paper showed clearly where some acid had been used to remove the original writing!

He turned to the other record; it showed the same state of affairs and—was that a brown stain—faint—hardly noticeable, but—was it a stain?

He stood the book on end and shaded the page so the light would show through the paper and then looked. It was a brown stain certainly now! Something had been written there under the ink of the word "LeRoi!"

He studied it carefully, tracing the faint brown tint that made a slight change in the color of the paper. N—a— it was "Nan!" The ink in which the word had been originally written had been removed with acid and "LeRoi" had been written in the space!

But it had been hastily done evidently, for all of the original ink had not been dissolved out of the paper by the acid, and time had brought this out, very faintly, but—plainly, as a light-brown stain clearly traceable under the right conditions!

The original Nan claim had been stolen from Bernard and handed over to Roy without a shadow of doubt and was now held by Roy under the title of the LeRoi, while the original LeRoi claim was now the Nan.

Somebody had deliberately accomplished this gigantic theft, and thereby Mrs. Bernard and Nan were deprived of the richest mine in the Northwest! That was very clear on the face of it.

Who had done this? Who would be most benefited? Roy! If he had done this thing personally—and it looked as though he had—he was the biggest thief unhanged. Probably he was a murderer as well, for a man who would steal as big a thing as this mine would probably not stop to kill a man who stood in the way, if by so doing he could safely get the property.

Meldrum's thoughts were racing like mad, examining every angle of evidence he had unearthed, trying to find a clue that would lead to the unraveling of this plot and the exposure of the guilty man who had carried it out.

He closed the book and quietly returned it to the white-haired recorder, thanking him for his trouble, and wondering how that official could help seeing the tremendous secret he had stumbled on.

He then casually asked the recorder if he had on file the original notice of location written in ink and filed by Bernard with him. The recorder remembered that Bernard had brought an original lead-pencil notice, and that he had stamped it with the recorder's date stamp at the time the record was written in the books, and that he had returned it to Bernard after the book record was written; he was sure of that, as he had copied it himself, and remembered it clearly, because the mine had turned out so very rich.

Thanking the old recorder, Meldrum left the office and went directly to Mrs. Bernard and Nan, to whom he explained in detail what he had found out and just what it meant and had meant to them for all these past years. They had been cheated out of several millions of dollars already, and Roy was the thief, unless he could explain how those changes had come about on the record books.

"The first thing I am going to do is to photograph this old original notice of the Nan location that was undoubtedly written by your father when he discovered and staked the claim," said Meldrum to Nan, who stood wide-eyed and breathless, listening to the story of the facts his research had laid bare.

"That old location notice is the most important piece of evidence in this case, for it proves the original owner of the present LeRoi mine to have been your father, who was also discoverer and locator. If that paper should be stolen or destroyed, we probably never could prove the facts; but if we make a photograph and have witnesses see it done so they can swear in court that the photograph is a true copy of the original, and that they know of their own personal knowledge that it is, then the original will not be so important. I'm going to attend to that the very first thing."

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Meldrum hurried away down-town where he hunted up four trusted friends, all sound business men of good reputation, and asked them to accompany him to the photographer's.

He had already arranged by phone for a notary to meet the party there, and this official was waiting when they arrived.

"Now, gentlemen, friends," he began, "I am going to ask each one of you, including the photographer and the notary, to in turn read this old document so you will be able to affix your signatures to an affidavit saying that you have read it and understand the contents. Then I want you to see it photographed, and to see the negative developed and the print made from that negative, so you can swear it is an exact photographic copy. Then I want you to see two reduced positive copies made from the negative so you can swear that they were made from it.

"I want you to be positive you can identify any or either of these exhibits again; and each one of you may, if you like, put a private identification mark or series of such marks on each or any of the exhibits so you can swear to the identity of them any time if I call on you.

"You are all friends of mine, so, even though I cannot now explain my reasons for doing these things, I am going to ask you to do as I have outlined, and afterward, here and now, to draw up a detailed statement that you have on this day and date done thus and so, and I want the notary to witness and acknowledge your signatures.

"Will you do this for me without asking for an explanation, and accepting my word, which I hereby give you, that there is nothing dishonorable, crooked, or in any way criminal or ungentlemanly about the whole procedure?

"If I could give you more information at this time I would do so, but I cannot, though I will later, so all I can do is to ask you as friends to do what I have asked, and to say nothing to any one about it, and I promise that I will explain why as soon as I can. I further promise that you will never regret having done as I ask. You know me, and I think you can trust me."

While they did not understand the rather strange request, they all knew Meldrum to be a "square man," and that says about all there is to say good about a man in the West, so they readily agreed to do as he asked.

Each man, one after the other, read the old, faded claim location notice carefully. They had all seen many such notices, as they were in a mining country, therefore it meant nothing special to them, being merely the notice of location of the Nan mine, one of the LeRoi group.

The photographer, after they were through, fastened the paper to his copying board with thumb-tacks, and proceeded in the usual manner to make his photographic copy.

"The light is not very good, Meldrum," he said; "if you don't mind I'll try another negative with shorter time and a flashlight shot to help light her up; that old paper is pretty yellow, and maybe this first negative won't be any too good; what do you say?"

"Certainly, go right ahead; I want the best negative I can get."

The photographer went into his workroom to prepare the flashlight, while Meldrum and his friends stood in a group in the operating-room, smoking and waiting for the camera man.

They talked of mining affairs in the surrounding district, as, like most Westerners, they were owners of more or less mining stock bought on speculation, for one never can tell when a "prospect" will turn into a rich producer under proper development, therefore a small amount of almost any legitimate stock in a mine under development is "a good gamble" in the West.

Several mines were discussed, and casual mention of the "War Eagle," a new prospect up in the Bitterroot Mountains, brought on an argument pro and con concerning its chances for becoming a "producer."

Billy Sands, a man of level temperament, a born gambler in mining stocks, and a good judge of geological conditions, was positive in his declaration that the War Eagle was soon to become a big thing.

Elmer Howard, as nervous as a hornet,

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an inveterate smoker, and skeptical of every mine until it made good, was as radical in his views on the other side, though he was well loaded up with War Eagle stock like the rest.

The argument grew rather heated, and Elmer's cigar went out, as it always did when he talked.

Mechanically he struck a match, lit the cigar, and puffed savagely two or three times, then gave the match a flip over his shoulder and, without noticing where it landed, plunged into the argument again.

A moment later the photographer came in with his paraphernalia ready to make the second negative.

"Hey! What the devil! Want to burn up my shop, you blamed chumps?"

As he spoke he jumped to the copying-board, jerked the old location notice off and threw it on the floor, stamping out the flames—Elmer's match had slid down between it and the board and set the old document on fire!

CHAPTER XI.

SETTING THE TRAP.

AFTER we had compared notes and reasoned things out to some extent, Jimmy thought we should get in touch with Sullivan and let him know that I was O. K.

Accordingly we went out, leaving the girl Mag in quiet possession of her lodgings.

I was rather astonished to find that we were on Twenty-Fourth Street, just off Fourth Avenue, only some four or five blocks from where I had been picked up by the kidnapers.

At a Fourth Avenue corner saloon Jimmy got the telephone and called up Sullivan. He gave the officer a short, terse description of the things that had happened to me, and told him I was there, whereupon Sullivan asked that I come to the wire.

"You bet I'm glad to hear your voice, Mr. Stone," he said; "I thought somebody had croaked you or dumped you into the river or something."

"No, I'm all right, only I have another score to settle with the lady with the red hair," I replied laughingly.

"Oh, yes," Sullivan answered, "I've been mulling this ring dope over, and I want to see you and have a talk about it as soon as I can. You go to your hotel, and I'll be there in an hour. Jimmy better be there, too, I may want to use him—that program suit you?"

"Yes, I want to get a bath and clean up a bit; but I can be ready to see you in an hour, I guess."

"All right, I'll be there; and say, I'll phone the hotel to send that bell-boy on your floor over to Brooklyn for something; I don't want to see him or have him see us to-night. You watch as you go in and see if he is on deck, if he is I want to know it. Good-by."

Jimmy promised to be on hand when Sullivan came, so I left him and went straight to my room, where I floundered through a good bath and donned clean clothing, much to my satisfaction, for I felt dirty and sticky after my confinement in that close, musty old room.

Sullivan and Jimmy were on time, both having come in without seeing the bell-boy.

"I've been thinking," said Sullivan as he sat down; "Jimmy says Dago George is to get a thousand bones from somebody for this green spark of yours, and that Red Liz says this party is from the West. Red Liz has got her orders from somewhere. She gets tanked and spills this, and Jimmy's girl, Mag, gets on.

"There's a party out West some place in touch with Red Liz, and they want this thing a thousand dollars' worth—Liz says so herself. Now who could it be, and why should they want it? There's some crookedness we don't get.

"Maybe this party is just another crook that wants the green spark because it's odd; but that isn't likely—who, then? Somebody that wants it for some particular reason, and not just because it's a ring. What's the reason? You don't know—I don't know. All we know is that some person unknown is to meet Dago George some time soon and pay him a thousand dollars for just one certain ring.

"We don't know when this is goin' to be pulled off. We do know that Old Levi has your spark salted until this party comes

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from the West, if Red Liz has told the truth. What's the answer? Why, we let Old Levi alone, and we keep cases on Dago George and Red Liz and let them lead us to it.

"This party from the West comes on, Red Liz meets them, and wises Dago George. Then they all get together and Old Levi comes through with the spark. Dago George gets his coin and splits it three ways, him and Liz and Old Levi. The Western party hits the pike and your ring is gone—see?

"Well, now we step in and bust the combination. We lamp Red Liz and the Dago, we let 'em meet up with this Western party, then we grab the gang. Then we get Old Levi, and he comes through with the spark or I send him up the river. That's the way I got it mapped; how does it look to you?"

"As far as I am concerned, Sullivan, it's your business, so you probably know more about it than I do. If you think that is the best plan, I am agreeable. All I want is my green opal ring back again. I may be foolish about it, but I've grown rather fond of that stone, and I'd like to get it if I can," I replied.

"All right, then. Jimmy, you keep an eye on the house, and if Dago George comes out you trail him. I'll give you a helper, and the pair of you ought to keep the Dago in sight if he leaves here. I'll put a pair of gum shoes on Red Liz, and I'll stay close to her myself; she's the one to watch, for she's going to get in touch with this Western party first.

"I'll pass you the word when we spring the trap, Mr. Stone, for maybe you would know this Wisenheimer from the Sunset country if you get your lamps on him, so you better stick around where I can get you on the phone quick if I need you—let it go as it lays—I'm on my way to start things rolling."

Sullivan and Jimmy went out, leaving me alone. I was just as well pleased, for I was tired, in spite of my recent enforced inaction.

I went out to dinner, then returned with a magazine, read a story or so and went to bed.

For the following two days I did nothing much but read and "stick around" near the telephone, as Sullivan had requested, but nothing happened, and I did not hear anything from the officer.

By mid-afternoon of the third day I had concluded to go to some show that evening and thus pass away a little time; then the phone rang. It was Sullivan.

"Grab a taxi and come to Twenty-Fourth Street and Third Avenue quick as the Lord will let you. I'll be there waiting—come on the jump, now!" directed the officer.

"Coming right away," I answered, then threw on my street clothes and bolted for the elevator.

On the street I jumped into the first taxicab I saw, giving the destination, and instructing the driver to make speed over the shortest possible route.

The driver, probably scenting a good tip, went around into Forty-Second Street and east like a comet, then turned south and went racing straight to Sullivan.

I paid my fare, and Sullivan drew me around the corner where I could see the entrance to a certain house on the south side of Twenty-Fourth Street, the bricks blood-red now in the low rays of the evening sun.

"Red Liz went in there with a tall guy wearing a big white hat about five minutes before I called you. She met him at the Grand Central Station and came straight here. It ain't her coop, but you can bet she knows the lay-out of the house, and all the getaways at that, as this neighborhood is her stamping ground.

"There's two plain-clothes men up on the other corner, two here, see 'em yonder? And there's one at each end of the alley back of this row of flats. I'm looking for Dago George any minute, and when he comes—holy smoke! Duck!"

Sullivan had backed up around the corner, pulling me after him. He now looked back again, through the ornamental iron railing of a stoop.

"They're coming this way, take a slant, see if you know the tall guy—don't let 'em see you!"

I looked cautiously through the rail as Sullivan directed, and there, not more than a third of a square distant, was Red Liz

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and the tall man who had attempted to steal my ring in Spokane! It was LeRoi, owner of the great LeRoi gold mine!

I turned back to Sullivan.

"Know him?" he questioned eagerly.

"Yes and no," I answered. "I know who he is, but I don't know him personally, as I've never met him."

"All right, come on, quick, now, before they turn the corner," said Sullivan, as he ran toward the alley.

I followed him. We reached the alley, and Sullivan, turning toward a man who was standing across the street on the east side of Third Avenue, made a series of cabalistic signs. This man lifted his hat, put it on the back of his head, and then turned carelessly away, walking slowly east on Twenty-Fourth Street.

"They've turned south on Third, we'll see where they go," said Sullivan, as he put a whistle to his lips and blew two short, sharp blasts.

Almost at once a taxicab came slowly southward, hugging the curb, on our side of Third Avenue. The door was open.

"Nail it on the run," said Sullivan, as he darted out of the alley and jumped into the cab with me at his heels.

The door slammed, and we pulled the curtains down. The "Vacant" flag was up, and the cab rolled slowly along, the driver humped down in his seat and smoking a cigarette. To any observer he would have appeared to be a taxi driver looking for a fare.

We followed the pair ahead of us for only two blocks, one south and one east.

They entered the hallway of a six-story flat building on Twenty-Third Street, with a store on the ground floor.

Leaving me sitting in the taxi, Sullivan went to a phone diagonally across the street from the flat building, telling me to watch the entrance until he returned.

While he was gone Red Liz came out of the hall and entered the store. She talked to a clerk who wrote something on a pad. Red Liz then pointed upward, and the clerk nodded his head as she came out and reentered the hallway.

When Sullivan came back I told him what had occurred.

"That's fine, fine!" he answered. "I'm going over and talk to that clerk. You stick here and watch the door; if they come out, you let me know. I'll watch for any signals you make, see?"

The officer crossed the street, and I saw him talking to the clerk. Then he threw back his coat, displaying his police star, and talked again to the clerk, who nodded his head in vigorous affirmative.

Then in the waning light, I saw a man come down the street and turn in at the hallway entrance. In a moment he cautiously stuck his head out again from the partly opened door and looked stealthily up and down Twenty-Third Street. It was Dago George!

Apparently satisfied, he closed the door and disappeared, and two minutes later Sullivan came out and joined me. I told him what I had seen.

"Fine! Bully! That's what I've been waiting for! Now we'll go up to Apartment A, on the sixth floor, and bust up a little party. Red Liz ordered a case of bottled beer sent up, the clerk told me, so there's going to be a confab of some kind up there right away, now that Dago George is here."

He left the cab and walked to the corner, where we casually met two men. Sullivan stopped and talked with them for a moment or two, then we went across the street and met two more, who also listened attentively to Sullivan.

We loafed on the corner for ten minutes more, and then four officers joined us.

"Come on," said Sullivan, as he led the way toward the hallway.

We went up in the elevator to the sixth floor, where one officer stopped with the elevator man, telling him to stay where he was and pay no attention to calls.

The rest of us went silently down the dim hall. A second officer remained where a cross hall branched off. The third went on down to the next cross hall, while number four waited with Sullivan and myself before a door marked "A."

Sullivan and the officer both had blue automatic guns in their hands when Sullivan rapped on the door and stepped quickly to one side.

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There was no answer. Sullivan rapped again. This time a muffled voice from within said: "Whad'ye want?"

"Here's yer beer, open up; I can't stan' here all day! What's a mattera youse!" Sullivan did it very well, I thought.

We heard a bolt slip back, then a key turned, and the door opened the smallest crack.

The toe of Sullivan's big shoe went against the door with a crash, and it gave inward.

Sullivan shoved his gun in and followed it, covering Dago George, who very promptly elevated his hands without being told.

The other officer went right in past Sullivan, through another door, with his gun ahead of him. Covering a man and a woman who sat at a table, he said, "Stick 'em up—quick!"

Both pairs of hands went into the air instantly; Red Liz and LeRoi were neatly trapped and helpless under our guns.

"Call the boys in from the hall, Mr. Stone," said Sullivan.

I stepped out to obey, and quick as a flash, Dago George rushed by me and was out in the dark hall while I was trying to get through the door.

Sullivan's gun barked, and the man pitched down to the floor. Whirling on his back, he whipped out a gun just as Sullivan plunged out after him.

He fired as the officer reached the hall, but missed, and before he could pull the trigger again the big officer was on him.

Dago George was wiry as a cat, but his right arm was useless, Sullivan's bullet having smashed the bone below the elbow. The two officers came running from the hall, and in twenty seconds Dago George was jerked to his feet, where he swayed, sick and helpless, in the hands of the policemen.

Sullivan looked at the captive's broken arm.

"Hospital; take him away," he said, and turned back into the room where the other policeman still held Red Liz and LeRoi under his gun.

Sullivan stepped up, turned the electric-light switch on, and then snapped handcuffs on the pair. Then he searched them both for arms, getting a fine automatic thirty-caliber gun from LeRoi, and a five-inch, thin-bladed stiletto from the under side of Red Liz's hat brim, just where she could have got it quickly and easily in case of need.

LeRoi had started visibly when he saw me enter the room, but had said nothing.

Red Liz recognized me and smiled.

"Good evening, Mr. Stone, I did not think you would treat a poor girl this way; it is not very gentlemanly of you," she said.

"Shut up, you." Sullivan pulled a chair over and sat down facing the pair.

"Now you two are going to answer some questions, and you're going to answer 'em straight. What I want to know from you, Liz, is, first, where is that green opal ring you glommed off Mr. Stone here? Spill it, and spill it quick and straight, now, my lady, or it will be the worse for you," he said.

Red Liz, handcuffed and guarded by a policeman with a loaded gun, half closed her eyes and smiled in a slow, languid way as she said with fine insolence, "Mr. Pussy-foot Sullivan, will you please go plumb to hell?"

CHAPTER XII.

ENTER TRAGEDY.

MELDRUM, realizing the nature of the catastrophe, reached down and picked up two or three small fragments of scorched paper, all that was left of his precious evidence!

On the floor a little black patch of carbon showed where the photographer had trampled the ashes against the boards; there was nothing left to prove Roy's theft of the mine, now, the paper might as well never have existed!

Meldrum, stunned by the blow, stood holding the little pieces of brown paper in his hands, a dumb statue of loss.

Then he smiled, a brave man's smile; and tossing the burned fragments of the old notice aside, said: "Well, that settles it, boys, all bets are off. I may—"

"Wait a minute, George," said the photographer, "I made an exposure before I

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went out, you know. I'll develop it now, and it may turn out to be a fairly good negative after all; if it is all right the loss of that old paper ought not to worry you, for I can give you a copy of it within a couple of hours; I made the negative the same size as the original. Come in the dark room, all you fellows, and see it developed; maybe it won't be so bad, you never can tell, you know.

"Jove! You're right! All of us saw you make the copy, now we'll see it developed, then we'll mark it with our own marks, so we can swear to it being the same one, and we can swear to the destruction of the original, for we all saw it burn up! I guess you are right, old man; maybe everything hasn't gone to smash after all!"

Meldrum was excited as he saw the possibilities of still saving the evidence as he followed with the rest into the dark room to see the plate developed.

The photographer, a good mechanic who understood his business, made up his developer, and, placing the plate in a tray under the red light, flooded it with the mixture.

Nothing happened, the plate gleamed dull yellow under the ruby rays of the light, while the waiting spectators held their breath.

Very soon the yellow emulsion grew dimmer, lost its color, and then a gray square slowly appeared, grew darker and more distinct, until every man in the room could recognize a negative reproduction of the burned paper, black against the glass of the plate, with the lettering standing out in white, seemingly a good photograph of the original paper.

The operator worked silently, rocking the tray deftly, and watching with critical, professional eye the changes taking place on the plate.

Presently he held the developed image up to the light, scanned it a moment, and then held the plate under the tap to wash the chemicals off before dropping it in the fixing bath.

"It is at least a fairly good negative. The lettering will be readable, I know," he said, as he smiled and wiped his hands. "Fifteen or twenty minutes more will tell the story, for it takes about that long for it to fix. When it comes out of the fixing bath, we'll know what we've got; come on, let's go outside. Elmer, you darned chump, you've got to quit playing with fire, you'll do something real foolish some of these days."

"By jingo," said Howard, "I did spill the beans, what? One thing is certain, I'm off matches for the rest of my life; going to buy one of those patent alcohol cigar-lighter jiggers the first thing I do when I get out of here—see if I don't—no more matches for me!"

"Just so you don't forget," you rattle-headed infant, I'm going to give you mine right now—here it is," said Meldrum. "I like you, Elmer, but you ought to have a keeper, you are so almighty thoughtless."

"You didn't get it right, George, I'm an ass; just a plain ass; you ought by rights to kick me for what I did; deserve it, by crickets, I sure do," Howard replied apologetically, for he really was much chagrined at the damage he had caused, and Meldrum was his friend and a good fellow; he'd do anything for Meldrum.

When the time was up, the photographer went back into the dark room, returning a moment later with the fixed negative which he held up to the light.

"Talk about luck!" he said, "look at that! A prettier negative I never saw! Even the dirty finger-marks and the texture of the paper itself show. I guess I'm not little old John D. Photographer—me! Now you fellows put your marks on it so you can read 'em yourself when they get cold, and I'll do the rest—be careful, Elmer, darn your hide, that's glass; don't you break it or I'll bust you one! That's some little old negative, Mr. Man, and George Meldrum thinks a lot of it, besides, it proves that I'm a real photographer—me—you get my drift, infant?"

The men each placed a private mark on the wet film, using a knife-point to scratch through it with. The photographer then placed it in a rack and turned an electric fan to blow a current of air against it.

In ten minutes or so it was dry enough to handle, and he then placed it in his camera in the bromid-room and made two

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tiny positive reproductions of it on separate pieces of celluloid film and quickly developed and dried them.

The notary then drew up a statement, detailing every step of the work from the time Meldrum brought the old document in. It set forth the facts concerning the burning of the original notice, and contained a running narrative of the successive operations of the photographic work without using technical terms.

When it was finished, each man signed it in turn, Meldrum with the rest. He was now fortified against almost any accident so far as the evidence against Roy was concerned.

Taking his two little positive films along, he left the photographer's with his friends, intending to return and get the negative after some prints had been made from it.

He went directly to the Bernard residence, where he showed the two small celluloid films to Nan and her mother, explaining that they were positive copies, made from a negative of the old location notice. He then told of the accidental burning of the old paper, and added that with the negative and these two positives in existence, it really made no vital difference.

"Now, Nan, you must understand that we can, by photographic process, reproduce a copy of the original document from either of these two little positive films, though they are no larger now than your little finger-nail.

"My reason for having these made is this: In each of the two rings we found in the old tin box, there is, as you know, an upper and lower cavity under the set. Both of these cavities are secret, no one knows that they exist there except you, your mother, and myself.

"The good M. Peraud, who made the rings, is dead, and it is not likely that he ever mentioned the secret places to any one; if he did, they would no longer be secret, therefore they would be of no use.

"Where, then, could we find a safer hiding place than these two lower cavities for these little copies of your father's old location notice, which are, I think, of untold value to your mother and yourself?

"With the idea of preserving at least one copy of the documents against all hazards, I have had the two positive films made, so one can be cut to fit into the lower cavity of each ring.

"You will wear one ring, and I will wear the other, thus doubly guarding against loss should anything happen to the original—do you see?"

"Oh, it's like a regular pirate treasure story! Let's put them in the rings right now," said Nan. Then very seriously she continued: "Do you think any one would try to steal them, George?"

"Yes, indeed I do," he replied. "If Roy is guilty of this gigantic theft, and I think he is, he will undoubtedly do everything in his power to destroy the evidence against him if he ever finds out that it exists. I think he would not stop at murder even if it should be necessary to remove the evidence or to retain his hold on the mine. Let us put these positives in the rings now, then I must go, for I intend to continue to hunt evidence until I can find enough to prove this case. I must also get the negative and place it in a safe-deposit vault for safe-keeping."

Nan brought a pair of scissors, and the two positive films were carefully cut out and fitted into the cavities by Meldrum, who then closed the rings, giving Nan hers and placing his own on his finger.

"Roy is back from Chicago, and I must go with him to the mine to-night, sweetheart. I have considerable to do yet before I leave. Be very careful that no one gets even an inkling of what you carry in your ring, and take good care of yourself and mother while I am gone," said Meldrum, as he took up his hat, kissed Mrs. Bernard dutifully, and started for the door.

Meeting Roy at the city office of the mine, which Roy had maintained as headquarters for years, Meldrum was introduced to "Mr. Cavanaugh, of Chicago," a low-browed, sharp-nosed man with shifty eyes and rather an evil cast of countenance.

He looked like an Italian or a Spaniard, judging from his olive skin, but there was a pasty, dead yellowish-white pallor about his face and hands that reminded Meldrum of a corpse; he made up his mind that he did not care for Cavanaugh's acquaintance.

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"Mr. Cavanaugh is thinking of taking an interest in the mine, Mr. Meldrum," explained Roy, "and will go with us this afternoon. I have explained to him that you are our engineer, and can therefore tell him anything he wants to know about the works, so he will probably be with you more than with me when we reach the plant. Kindly answer any questions he may ask concerning the operation of the mine or anything else connected with your department."

"Very well, anything I can do for you, Mr. Cavanaugh, I will be glad to, under the circumstances, I am sure." Meldrum then excused himself on the plea of having to gather together certain blue-prints and papers to take to the mine.

For several years the north country had been connected with Spokane by rail, and the night train to Oroville carried the three men to Kettle River in time for breakfast.

Meldrum escorted Mr. Cavanaugh all over the underground property during the day, taking him down in the shaft cage to the lower workings where they inspected the drifts and tunnels. In reply to questions, Meldrum gave details of past work and production of the "LeRoi."

The whole conversation was such as would be carried on by any one intending to obtain an interest in the property, and late in the afternoon the two men came to the surface again, where they removed their rough underground clothing ready to go to the office.

Meldrum had felt a curious antipathy to his companion all day, and he could not rid himself of the idea that the strange, corpse-like pallor of the man somehow suggested prison and long confinement; he could not bring himself to accept Cavanaugh as a man and an equal at all, yet he could not tell why, for there had been nothing to cause such a feeling except the simple "sense" of personal antagonism.

He was therefore glad that Roy met them in the storehouse where they went to remove their wet, dirt-stained outer clothing worn during the inspection trip.

Roy, good-natured, smiling, and seemingly well satisfied with himself, told Meldrum that he would escort Mr. Cavanaugh through the surface works, so he could inspect the engines, the ore chutes, stamp-mill, and other appurtenances, an opportunity to part company with his disagreeable companion that Meldrum gladly availed himself of, going directly to his own office and drafting-room located in the valley of Kettle River, a hundred yards or so from the shaft.

Roy then led the way from place to place about the plant until the stamp-mill was reached.

He explained to Cavanaugh that it would be impossible to talk while in this place because of the terrific noise made by the heavy crushing machinery that was used to pulverize the ore as it came from the mine.

"Step right through this door and go ahead; I'll be right behind you, and the walk is broad and safe," said Roy, as he opened a door and motioned his visitor to precede him.

Cavanaugh entered, going up a slight incline to a narrow hanging walk, or platform, without any guard rail, which had been built along over the ore chutes back of the great crushing stamps so workmen could get to and clear any of the chutes running from the conveyor down to each stamp. The ore was fed in through these chutes to fall directly under the ponderous hammers, each one so heavy that a single blow from it reduced huge rock fragments almost to powder.

A strange glitter of excitement came into Roy's eyes as Cavanaugh, taking the lead, went on slowly out along the walk over the steel chutes.

A workman or two were about the interior of the plant, but they were below the stamps, and the walk was thus entirely screened from their view by the machinery.

Half-way down the length of the building, Roy glanced swiftly about; there was no one in sight, and he had fastened the door behind him as he came in.

Reaching forward, he tapped his companion on the shoulder, pointing downward, and saying something as Cavanaugh turned.

The noise swallowed up every sound of his voice—as Roy knew it would—so he leaned down directly over one of the ore chutes and pointed under the platform on

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which they were standing, motioning for his companion to look.

Cavanaugh bent over to see what it was Roy was pointing at.

Like a flash Roy straightened up and struck downward with his fist—a full arm blow that caught the unsuspecting Cavanaugh at the base of the brain and sent him plunging downward into the ore-chute.

"You will blackmail me, you damned crook! You will, will you?" Roy shrieked as the man flashed down the ore-chute and disappeared under the great steel crusher.

"Ha! Ha! You knew too much, and you couldn't keep your mouth shut, you damned safe-cracker! Blackmail me, will you! Not now! Not now!" The noise of the machinery swallowed his voice as it left his lips—he could not even hear it himself.

Roy stood for a few seconds laughing like a crazy hyena as he gloated over the way he had outwitted and removed the man who knew he had changed the mining records, for Cavanaugh was his old accomplice—the safe-cracker.

Then, white with rage and excitement, and with cold sweat dripping from his face, Roy rushed into the engine-room.

"Stop her! Stop her quick, for God's sake! There's a man under the stamps!" he shouted to the horrified engineer who shut off the steam and rushed toward the stamp-mill, shouting to every workman he could see. Roy, grinning sardonically, wiped the sweat from his face.

"A lot of good it will do now! He's pounded to mincemeat by this time, you fools," he murmured as he laughed, a horrible, croaking laugh that was half snarl, half growl.

Meldrum, coming back from his quarters for some papers he had left in the clothing-room on his trip underground, heard the engine shut down and saw the men running.

Knowing that something had happened, he bounded toward the stamp-mill as fast as all his young strength would take him.

He was first to enter the building, and his eye caught sight of a limp white hand hanging over the edge of one of the stamp-tables half-way down the building.

He rushed to the place and climbed up. Cavanaugh, the lower half of his body crushed to a pulp, lay dying.

Meldrum raised his head—the man opened his eyes just as the engineer climbed up to help Meldrum.

"How did it happen?" asked Meldrum, as he looked at the white, corpselike face.

"Roy — Roy — pushed-me-into-chute—damn—damn him! He—stole—this—mine — 1899 — changed — record — records — office—I—I—saw—him—do—it! He—he —knew—that—I—I—knew! He's—got—me—got—me—damn—damn—him!

"You—get—get—him—for—this! He —stole—mine—1899—"

The man's head lolled over on his shoulder and his eyes began to glaze—he was dead.

Meldrum looked at the pale-faced engineer. "You heard what he said?" he asked.

"Every word of it—God, what a thing to do to a man!" said the engineer.

"I happen to know this man tells the truth; Roy did steal this mine from Mrs. Bernard. Can you keep your mouth shut till the right time comes?"

The engineer looked straight into Meldrum's eyes—

"You better believe I can—and will—till you give the word, if you know what you are talking about," he said. Then glancing down at the dead man, he whispered in an awed voice, "God! What a hellish thing to do to a man!"

They lifted the crushed body over the edge and eased it down to other workmen who had gathered on the ground below. A plank was procured, the body laid upon it, and the men carried it from the building while the engineer and Meldrum followed.

"I'll tell you about it when I get a chance; meantime, keep still about this—let Roy tell his story, and let him think we don't know any different until the time comes. I'll see you to-night; meet me at the office after supper and we'll take a walk," said Meldrum.

"I'll be there," the engineer answered, and joined the group ahead.

The body was taken down the gulch to the office building where Roy had already gone. Meldrum and the engineer watched him as they brought the body in.

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White as a ghost, he had an open whisky-bottle on the desk.

"Awful thing! Awful, Mr. Meldrum!" he said. "And him a Chicago man with a family! I don't know how we can break the news to them! He was just in front of me on the overhead walk right over number five chute. Suddenly he stumbled, or his foot slipped, and before I could put out a hand he was gone! God! What a thing to happen to a man."

Roy looked and certainly acted the part of one who had received a terrible shock.

"I think I'd be as unnerved as he is if I had just thrown a man under those crushers," Meldrum told himself.

Aloud he said: "Yes, you are right, Mr. Roy, that is a horrible way for a man to meet his end. There must be an iron rail placed along the walk—a good, strong one, that a man can grip and hang on to if he goes over the edge up there; it should have been done in the first place—then this could not have happened."

He was looking straight into the eyes of the guilty man as he finished.

Roy looked away, and taking another stiff drink, he turned and said: "You are quite right; the railing must be built at once, Mr. Meldrum; I will leave it to you to see that it is done.

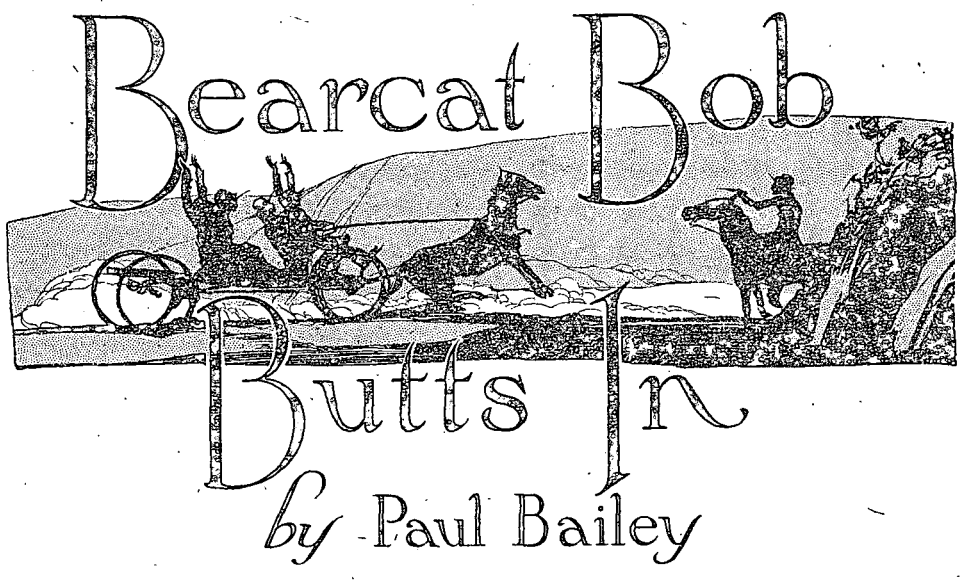
"And will you see that attention is given now to that poor body? I am so unnerved by the accident that I am shaking like a leaf! It was an awful thing to see him go—go—under there, Meldrum! I've got to get myself together, I'm not fit to attend to anything. Will you see to the body?"

"Yes," said Meldrum, as he turned and went out the door.

Roy closed the door, and no longer acting a part, stood watching through the window as the young engineer strode down the path toward the group of men clustered around the body awaiting instructions.

"I wonder if he knows anything?" mused Roy, as he watched. "If I thought he did I'd get him too—damn his inquisitive hide! I didn't like him in the first place, but the widow would have him. I like him less and less the more I see of him. I wonder if he knows anything—or thinks he does?"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



WHEN Miss Katharine's bosom-pleated fiancé arrived from the East, we didn't lose any time making things interesting for him. I being foreman, showed him around the Double Z, and Bearcat Bob, being my understudy, taught him the rudiments of roughing it.

Yes, sir, for the first twenty-four hours me and young Bearcat fair monopolized Emerson Applegit. And we was just start-

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ing him on the second day of instruction when the Old Man's daughter suddenly intervened.

"Bob," she cried, coming into the corral as Bearcat and several other explosive ingredients of the Double Z outfit released our official bucking bronco for an early morning jaunt around the enclosure, "you should be ashamed of yourself. Emerson has never ridden anything but a properly broken thoroughbred."

I forgot to mention that Emerson Applegit was on the bronc.

"Well," says Bearcat, turning toward me, so Miss Katharine wouldn't see him scowl, "this sure is an awful come-down for Emmy."

And it was. The little roan bucker hadn't any more than taken three good hops when its human burden severed connection with the leather and came down like a barrel of cement going over Niagara Falls.

I always did figure that little roan's grandmother was a kangaroo, and was just going to say something to that effect when Bearcat Bob beat me to it.

"Yuh know, Miss Katharine," says he, "that cayuse has got the most effective stiff-legged jolt I ever hopes to see. Did yuh notice the way she—"

"You brute!" says Miss Katharine, stamping her pretty little foot impatient like. "Are you injured, Emerson?"

Emmy didn't answer right away. His mouth was too full of alkali, and maybe it's just as well that he didn't. By the time he'd emitted the mud, he had more or less control of himself, and I've always opined that the Double Z outfit thereby lost a rare treat in the way of Bostonian cussology.

"I guess I'm not seriously hurt," he finally admits, after feeling of his various limbs and smoothing out his sitting-section with one hand. "Robert told me the animal had no tricks, but it certainly seems that he has."

"Tricks?" says Bearcat, thereby qualifying as one of Kaiser Wilhelm's 1914 diplomats. "That yere cayuse ain't got a single trick. They're all habits. Boys, I guess mebbe we better close up school. Our pupil don't seem to be progressing a darned bit."

"I'm ashamed of you, Bob," says Miss Katharine, but I noticed that her big brown eyes wasn't entirely free of laughter.

"I figured mebbe yuh might me," says Bearcat. "I'm sort of ashamed of myself. But I ain't never had no experience at running a kindergarten. I reckon I better ride over to Coyote Gulch and hire a nurse."

Well, sir, if that Applegit colt had had one drop of red blood in his carcass he sure would have shown it then and there. But no. He just twists his facial muscles into a correct registration of oh-how-I-hate-yuh, and follows his protectress out of the corral.

"Bearcat," I says, as we all stood there watching them go, "Emmy sure ain't what yuh'd call a dangerous character. In fact, yuh might almost say he was extremely timid."

"Timid be darned," says Bearcat Bob, thereby proving that him and Emmy could never be bosom companions. "That ain't timidness. It's plain yaller. And let me tell yuh all something"—turning to the boys—"when you strike a gazabo that ain't got no sense of humor, he's wicked—wickeder than a snake with pizen in its fangs. Why, I'd sooner trust that outlaw, Jesse Kramer, we're reading about, than a man without humor."

"Hold on, Bearcat; hold on," says I, though I wasn't entirely above suspecting Emerson of fitting the description, "this young tenderfoot is a son of Old Man Churchill's best pal. The Old Man thinks a heap of Emmy's father. And the Old Man is bent on making this yere Emerson youth his son-in-law. Leastwise, that's the way it looks to me."

Which information showed darned poor judgment on the part of yours truly. Bearcat just naturally went all to pieces, and for a minute or so I thought maybe he contemplated fireworks, so I just drops my right hand to the butt of my forty-four and continues, easy like:

"Now, don't go to getting locoed all to once. Yuh know as well as I do that the two of 'em's engaged. Yuh know Emmy came here for the one and only purpose of teaming up with Miss Katharine. And yuh

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ought to know that yuh nor I nor nobody else on the pay-roll of the Double Z is going to have anything to say about how and when said hitching is to be performed. Yuh act as if yuh was in love with Old Man Churchill's daughter. Afore Emmy hit camp, Miss Katharine and you was always together, riding, walking, and just sitting. But yuh didn't reckon she was taking yuh serious, did yuh?"

Of course, I kept my hand right on the gun, but it didn't stop Bearcat from giving me one of them long-term once-overs that is apt to portend the severance of diplomatic relations.

"Jake," he says, awful deliberate, "sometimes I think yuh ain't long for this yere world. Yuh take such awful chances with yuh vocabulary. I reckon I don't love Miss Katharine no more than what I can get over. And I reckon I don't need no suggestions from you nor nobody else in getting over it. Is that plain?"

Sure it was plain. It was plain to all hands, and all hands, including yours truly, just naturally postponed any further discussion of Bearcat Bob Bingham's personal worriments.

But there wasn't no discussion necessary to convince ourselves that Bearcat Bob was far from happy. He stopped buttoning his shirt at the neck and got to eating breakfast before combing his hair. He seemed all wrapped up in the one idea to advertise a badly busted spirit by his general appearance. And to look at him yuh'd have thought that his single purpose in life was to secure new contracts for the undertaker.

Thus affairs on the Double Z buck-jumped along for a spell. While Bearcat was getting carelesser and carelesser, Miss Katharine and Emerson Applegit kept a working up their enthusiasm to the nuptial stage, and Old Man Churchill naturally let 'em keep working.

One day he says to me, more or less confidential:

"Jake, what do yuh think of my pal's only son and heir?"

We was on the front porch of the ranch-house at the time, and Miss Katharine and Emmy had just left for a little ride up the trail toward Coyote Gulch. Emmy was riding old Rose, the most genteelest hunk of horseflesh that ever wore a girth. And as I looked at Emmy's padded shoulders rising and falling with the rhythm of the ride, I couldn't help remarking:

"Well, boss, he won't never be worth nothing punching cows. That is, not unless yuh get him a tricycle."

The Old Man grinned. More than that, he laughed. And do yuh know, there was something about the technique of that laugh which caused me to look at him and wonder if he was going to make a truly loving pa-in-law. He sure didn't seem to have no superfluous admiration for his daughter's fiancé.

"Jake," he says, "funny I ain't never heard a word from my pal, Bill Applegit, of Boston — not a word since I wrote, asking him to send his boy on for a visit. The only response I ever got from my letter was the arrival of Emmy, as the boys call him."

"Well," says I, "yuh can't hardly blame the father—Emmy himself ought to be answer enough to any letter. Yuh ask me what I think of him. Well, boss, I'll just refer yuh to Bearcat. He's got certain fixed ideas on the subject that he ain't particular about expressing."

"Bearcat?" says the Old Man. "Say, Jake, he sure is some boy, now, ain't he? Do yuh know, I got an awful warm spot for that young animal. If I hadn't"—here his eyes signaled a storm, and he raised his voice—"if I hadn't, yuh can bet yuh boots I sure would have bounced him quick for talking to my guest the way he talked to Emmy."

"Aw, he don't mean nothing to what he says," I told him, and I guess that white one didn't register none against me on high.

"Mebbe you're right, Jake; mebbe you're right," opines the Old Man.

And as I went back to the bunk-house I kept asking myself how Old Man Steve Churchill could stand for having his one and only child hitched up to Emerson Applegit.

But Emerson didn't seem to class me with the rest of our outfit. Maybe he figured that, being foreman, I was sort of

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duty bound to protect the ranch-house guests whether I wanted to or no. Anyhow, now and then he'd catch me alone and act real chummy.

So I wasn't oversurprised the next morning when he trots up to me with a sort of jovial expression in his eyes and asks me to have the two-seated buckboard ready for him after the noonday meal.

"You see," he explains, "Miss Katharine and I are going to be married. We rode over to Coyote Gulch yesterday and arranged for the ceremony. It's going to be a sort of surprise for Mr. Churchill, so we haven't told him a thing about it."

"My, won't he be tickled," says I, thinking of the way the Old Man had laughed at Emmy's bobbing shoulders the day before. "I reckon he will go plumb loco."

"Yes," says Emmy, pleased at my compliment, "and we want you to drive for us, Jacob."

Maybe I didn't act over enthusiastic at the information; at any rate, he hurries on with:

"You know, I don't have a great deal of faith in your helpers. They treat me very rude."

"That so?" says I. "Well, now, I'll have to chastise 'em for that. Yes, I'll drive for yuh. I'll hitch old Rose to the double buckboard and be at the house right after grub."

"Oh, no," says Emmy, looking more or less alarmed. "It's to be a surprise for Katharine's father. So she and I will stroll down the trail as soon as the meal is over, and you can pick us up. Don't tell a living soul."

"Not even a dead one," I promised, and thus it was fixed, all fixed. That is, all except those little sideplays which nobody but Old Man Fate ever gets wise to until it's too late.

Right after dinner I hooked Rose up to the two-seater and climbed in front.

"Where yuh going?" asks Bearcat Bob, as I picks up the ribbons.

Well, sir, it might have been plain, unadulterated deviltry, but I reckon it'll be marked down against the aforesaid Fate. I smiles at Bearcat and says:

"Climb in, I'm going to Coyote Gulch."

He climbed in, and as we rolled out of the yard I kept looking off toward the right, so's he wouldn't see the grin I couldn't keep down.

And it sure was funny. Bearcat Bob Bingham, the youthful victim of an uncontrollable jealousy, going to his lady love's wedding and him not wise. But when we came to Miss Katharine and her dolled-up fiancé waiting beside the trail, I thought it was all off.

Bearcat looked like the last rose of summer meeting up with an early winter frost. He didn't say a word. He couldn't. The wedding couple was in the back seat before he had made up his mind to hop out, and I let old Rose rustle right along.

But Emerson Applegit had certain questions that wanted answering, and afore we'd covered more than a mile of trail toward the Gulch, Emerson leans over and says:

"I thought you were coming alone, Jacob."

"So did I," says I, nudging Bearcat to keep still, "but Bearcat here had some buying to do at the Gulch, and I figured that mebbe yuh wouldn't begrudge him a front seat."

"Of course not," says Miss Katharine, but Emmy wasn't so given to agreeing. Maybe he was a little suspicious of hostilities. He says:

"Does Robert know where we are going?"

"Not unless he got it from a little bird," says I. "And I reckon he don't care a whole lot."

"You said it, Jake," says Bearcat, swinging around to get a peep at his arch enemy. "But if yuh want me to clamber out of tis yere rig and walk, I opines I can accommodate yuh."

He even made a move to jump, but I grabbed his arm.

"Of course not," says Miss Katharine, and I guess the plea in her voice kept him where he was.

"Of course not," adds Emerson. "I was only wondering why you had brought your pistol along."

"Oh," says Bob, drawing his gun and

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handing it butt-first to the tenderfoot, "I reckon I won't need it none if yur decide to beat me up. Take it."

And that suspicious son of Old Man Churchill's best pal took the gun and laid it on his lap. He sure was nervous. And as I glanced around I noticed that Miss Katharine's face wasn't wreathed with any smile of happiness.

"Go long, Rose," I says, to hide my disgust, and we rolled around Coyote Bend on two wheels.

Then we stopped. That is, Rose stopped. She stopped because I stopped her. And I stopped her because a strange gentleman, with a bandanna over his lower features and a gun in his hand, was standing his pony right in our path.

"Put up yuh hands!" he says in a way that showed he was used to it.

Well, sir, I can elevate my paws with the next one, and I ain't backward about doing it when discretion is called for. But I was the only effective member of our party at that particular moment. Bearcat Bob was unarmed, and Emerson Applegit was wishing he was too, I reckon.

In fact, he jerked that gun off his lap as if it was red-hot and slung it out into the trail.

It was just that unusual procedure on the part of Emerson which gave me an opening. The road agent let his eyes drift past me, and I drawed.

'Twasn't my fault that I didn't draw quite quick enough. He winged me in the right arm, just above the elbow. The limb went cold, and my gun went out of the wagon.

"Climb down, all hands," says the stranger, and none of us showed any delinquency about complying. Out in our country the man with the gun does most of the talking, and what he says goes.

He lined us up beside the trail, shoulder to shoulder. He had me at the head of the class, mebbe because I was winged and couldn't start nothing. Next to me came Emerson Applegit, and my, how he was quivering. Yuh'd have thought he was posing as a mermaid basking on the north pole.

He looked so confounded scared that Miss Katharine edged right away from him and grabbed the arm of Bearcat, who stood on her far side.

That highwayman sure knew his business. Having climbed down off his cayuse, he took a little canvas sack from inside his shirt, and the first donations received was a jack-knife, a pipe, and a bag of long-cut from yours truly.

"Times is awful hard," says I, as he dropped the findings into his sack. "If yuh'd come round afore I'd did my Easter shopping, I think mebbe I could have helped yuh along a little better."

"Shut up," he says. Then he unclasped Emerson's wrist-watch and tore out his diamond stud.

"Yuh take off yuh cuff-links and rings," he tells Emmy, "while I see what yuh got under cover."

Well, sir, Emmy yanked off his jewelry like as if it was all brass and he was ashamed of it. Then he stood there as peaceful as old Rose herself, while the bandit lifted his wallet and brought a little pasteboard box out of his vest-pocket.

It was the groom's gift to the bride. And as Bearcat Bob saw the little band of gold come out of the box and disappear into the sack, the full purpose of our ride to Coyote Gulch hit him like a mule's hind hoof.

But what could Bearcat do? He was gunless. And getting shot wasn't going to help matters none. That's the way I reasoned it, and I guess mebbe Bearcat reasoned it that 'r way too.

But when the bandit started on Miss Katharine, reason went all to smash. Bearcat Bob sprang with every spring in his body, and as he sprang he managed to wind one set of fingers around the stranger's right wrist. The other set just naturally shot up and necessitated a nice fat job for the dentist.

As yuh might suppose, the bandit went down. But he wasn't no slouch himself when it came to the rough stuff. He held that right arm of his'n out rigid, and he clung to the gun like as if it was his very life itself. And he and Bearcat commenced a rapid exchange of welts with their free left arms.

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And to think that I couldn't do nothing more than to stand there and await results. But it had to be. My right arm was hanging like a loose cinch-strap, and the bullet-hole was leaking good and proper.

"Get in there and help him," I says to Emerson; but I might just as well have spoken to old Rose.

He was gazing back toward home, like as if he wished he hadn't come, and I guess maybe Miss Katharine wished he hadn't, either. She curled her lip as she looked at him, and then, being the kind of a woman that always wants to be helping, she ran over and rescued the guns we'd dropped out of the wagon.

"Shoot him, Jake," she says, as she handed me mine; but I shook my head. I never was no good with my left, and Bearcat Bob and the road agent was twisting around in the trail, like if they was kids scrambling for pennies. I was afraid I might plug Bob by mistake.

But of a sudden they stopped scrambling, and then we could see that Bearcat had worked his position around until his head was right over the gun in the bandit's outstretched hand. Down went his head, and two sets of the finest teeth that ever adorned a human mouth went into that road agent's wrist.

Of course he let go. He let go that gun like as if it was decorated with cactus, and afore I knew what next to do, Miss Katharine had reached down and pressed the other gun into Bob's right hand.

After the muffled explosion, Bob climbed to his feet. He was grinning. Fighting always did make him grin. That's why we called him Bearcat.

"Now we'll proceed to Coyote Gulch," he says, after hauling the mortal coil of the late lamented stranger to the side of the trail. "Yuh arm looks bad, Jake. We'll dig up a quack on the way to the sheriff's."

If it hadn't been for that, I reckon Miss Katharine would have taken us right straight home without any stops. But the sheriff had to hear about the untimely demise within his jurisdiction, and my arm sure did need some sort of treatment without delay.

So I picked up the sack of plunder which the stranger had let drop during his closing performance. And I was just about to climb in alongside of Bearcat, who had the ribbons, when Miss Katharine says, sort of testy like:

"I want you with me, Jake. Let Emerson get in front." And thus we proceeded, with the two cripples in the rear, me wounded in the wing and Miss Katharine in the heart.

And old Rose must have thought it was a hearse she was hauling into Coyote Gulch; we was that quiet.

Bearcat reined in at the M. D.'s, and while I was inside getting repaired I reckon there wasn't much conversation out in the rig that escaped me. Their three mouths looked as if they hadn't been moved during my absence, and so, to break the monotony, I says as I climbed aboard:

"To the sheriff's, Jawn."

Well, sir, Bearcat didn't even nod. He had an English coachman beaten to a frazzle for stiffidity, and young Applegit was sure a close second.

They sat as if they had been friz, and there wasn't nothing short of hell that would thaw 'em out. And they sat that 'r way until we got to the parsonage, and then Bearcat just naturally halted old Rose, and without so much as turning around says:

"This yere is where the official hitcher hangs out."

Nobody spoke and nobody stirred. That is, nobody except young Applegit. And he didn't stir until the inactivity had gotten on his nerves. Then he slides out of the rig and stands there waiting for Miss Katharine to do likewise.

"Go on," says Bearcat to her, seeming to enjoy the delay. "Yuh ain't going to let a little thing like the sudden death of a total stranger interfere with yuh matrimonial plans, are yuh?"

That was too much. Miss Katharine gave my sore arm an awful jolt in her anxiety to put force into her statement.

"Bob," she says, "do you think I would marry a coward?"

"I never was called that afore," says Bob; and I dunno how he did it, but he

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was out of that rig and had Miss Katharine alongside of him quicker 'n a maverick doing the Mexican buck.

Well, sir, I followed them into the parsonage, and along behind me came Emerson Applegit.

Maybe he was scared at being left alone. Maybe he figured to bust up the ceremony. Anyhow, he followed us inside. And he didn't open his peeper while Bearcat Bob Bingham and the boss's daughter was being buckled up.

As for me, I just sat down on the parsonage sofa and emptied the little canvas sack of all its plunder. And at the psychological moment I handed Bearcat the groom's gift to the bride, and he sure did take it with joy in his eyes. And Miss Katharine didn't look none like as if she was going to weep.

Then I pulled some documents out of that sack, and sat there reading the private correspondence of the deceased without a qualm of conscience. But it didn't prevent me from seeing the last strap cinched and the ensuing grizzly bear between Mr. and Mrs. Bingham. And it didn't prevent me from hearing Bearcat say in an uncertain, trembly voice:

"Yuh know, Katharine, I ain't never been kept awake nights over my old man's bank account, like Emmy here. In fact, I dunno as I can buy yuh a limousine—not this year, anyway. And, like as not, Churchill senior's gift to the groom will be a grand bounce off the pay-roll of the Double Z. You're sure taking awful chances with me, Katharine."

"I don't care about that, Bob," says Katharine, smiling all over and kissing him where one eye was beginning to turn black. "Dad 'll make you a partner, if I say so."

"Wow!" says I, hopping up and getting into the first family argument right then and there.

Maybe it didn't mean much, but it brought the attention of all hands, including the Rev. and Mrs. Stevenson, the bride and groom, and Emerson Applegit to a proper focus on yours truly.

"Wow!" I says again, to show that they hadn't misunderstood me. "Bearcat, do yuh know what that shot through the outlaw's gizzard did for yuh?"

"Sure," says Bearcat, thinking to beat me to it. "It won me the finest little wife ever."

"Correct," says I. "Sit down. It also brought yuh ten thousand dollars' reward. That yere road agent was Jesse Kramer, and that gizzard that yuh perforated was worth its weight in rubies."

Of course it pleased him. He even shook hands with Emerson Applegit. And while Emmy was working his fingers back into place Bearcat gave Parson Stevenson all the spare change he had on his person and promised him more.

"And I will pay yuh for that gold ring, too, Emmy," says Bearcat, as we pranced back to the buckboard.

"It's yours," says Emmy; "yours by right of conquest." Which showed that even the son of Old Man Churchill's best pal wasn't beyond reconciliation to the hand of Fate.

And after we'd been to the sheriff's office and reported the location of the ten thousand dollar carcass, we rode home again. That is, all but Emmy. There was an express for the East left Coyote Gulch late that night, and Emerson Applegit sat in the last coach.

We didn't miss him none. We didn't even think of him. Not until we reached the Double Z and had broken the gladsome news as gently as possible to the Old Man. Then he says:

"Bob, my boy," wringing Bearcat's gun hand father like, "yuh sure have done me one noble service. I got a letter from my old pal, Bill Applegit, this afternoon. It seems he just found out that his colt, Emmy, side-tracked my letter to him. This yere Emmy, being a sort of profligate son, figured that mebbe his old man wouldn't want to wish him on us. So he just hid that letter in his powder-box and came West on the Q. T. to visit his old man's best pal's little girl. And I reckon I'm darned glad yuh didn't bring that profligate son back with yuh. The Double Z ain't got no fatted calves to spare—leastwise, not on such prodigal sons as this here Emerson Applegit."

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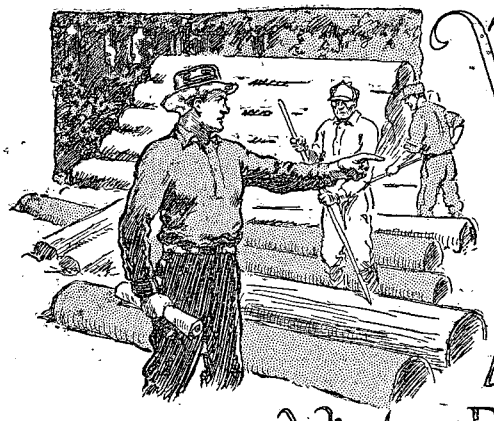

Wooden Spoil

by

Victor Rousseau

Author of "Midsummer Madness," "The Sea Demons," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED.

WHEN Hilary Askew made up his mind that he did not want to sell the Canadian timber-tract to which he had fallen heir, that was all there was to it, even if the decision spelled trouble with a large T.

A certain M. Brousseau was responsible for most of the trouble. Brousseau wanted two things. He wanted Hilary's timber-lands and he wanted Hermine Rosny, daughter of Seigneur Rosny, who had originally owned the property which Hilary's late uncle had bought. Brousseau had the seigneur's consent to marry Hermine, which only made Hilary all the more determined to fight, because, though Hermine gave him no reason to feel in the least encouraged, he could not put her out of his thoughts.

After war was declared between Hilary and Brousseau, things went wrong all around. A lawsuit threatened; a strike got under way; and then the Brousseau liquor gang brought their drinking and gambling hells into St. Boniface when Hilary was staggering under the weight of a blow that was meant to be a knock-out. Through treachery he had lost nearly all of the lumber he was getting ready to market, but he was determined to fight the Brousseau crowd's invasion of St. Boniface, and, in spite of being warned by Hermine, went into the new "den of alcoholism" and spilled most of the liquor on the floor. But a trap had been prepared for him. When it was sprung he had four men to fight. And fight them he did until that moment when the knife dropped by Louis Duval, and wielded by Louis's brother Simeon, found its home beneath Hilary's shoulder.

So that Hilary stumbled and pitched forward upon the stable floor, and lay there.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HAVEN.

LAFE CONNELL, at M. Tremblay's hotel, stretched out his legs upon a chair and puffed viciously at his pipe, while M. Tremblay leaned against the wall of the house and listened to his guest's semisoliloquy.

"Yep, Tremblay, I'm through now," Lafe was saying. "I'm through for good, and I'm going to wait here till the boat comes to-morrow, and then beat it for Shoeburyport. Lord, I'll be glad to see Clarice—my wife—and the kids again!

"I've put up a good fight, Tremblay. I've stood for things which no mortal man ought to be made to stand for. I've seen it keep raining for six weeks at a stretch because it didn't have sense enough to stop, and not a word escaped me. I've seen Father Lucy blessing the cabbages to make 'em grow, and I kept my tongue flat in my head, though maybe it's soured me a little. And I don't want to rub it in any more about this here veranda of yours, Tremblay.

"I've stood for all them things, and they've taken advantage of my leniency. I'm through with it—all of it. I've dropped nine thousand dollars in this fool game and borrowed on my life insurance, and Clarice—my wife—and me will have to start buying our home again when I get

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back to Shoeburyport, and maybe I won't hear nothing about it, neither. I'd have stood for all them things and more; but when it's a case of dropping the property rather than let Mr. Rosny put in a word to them fools at the mills, I'm finished. I've come to the end. The end—finish—no more. You understand what I mean, Tremblay.

"So that's about all. I take the boat to-morrow back to God's land, where it rains or shines without thinking it can't change its mind till the next Presidential election, and where the verandas match the houses and the cabbages grow natural. And if you hear that Mounseer Askew's head's been cracked open because he thought he was hatchet secretary to the Ladies' Temperance Union, don't you blame me for it, because I've warned him to keep out of trouble till I'm tired, and it ain't any use. Use—worth while, Tremblay, comprenny?

"I'm going to leave him to his fate," continued Lafe, trying to draw a few more whiffs of tobacco from his burned-out plug. "It ain't my fault. I ain't no Caroline N. That ain't my job. He'll get his head busted, and he deserves to have it busted."

He shook his pipe out angrily.

"I guess I shouldn't have told him about Louis Duval opening up," he said, "but I was so piping mad I just wanted him to run into trouble. Maybe I ought to have kep' quiet. But let him go. It 'll be a lesson to him. I wouldn't raise my finger to help him if his head was being busted open right here before my eyes, Tremblay. Eyes—you know what I mean. These here."

"*Oui,*" said Tremblay; and the word conveyed any significance that its hearer might choose to put upon it. "*Oui,*" he continued thoughtfully, though what he was thinking about was incomprehensible.

"It ain't my job," Lafe pursued. "Let 'em use him as rough as they like. I'd laugh. I'm a family man. I got my wife and kids to think about, and I'm against violence. It ain't reasonable to hire a man for manager, and then expect him to go round saloon-busting, is it, Tremblay?"

"*Oui,*" answered Tremblay.

"You're right," said Lafe. "Of course it ain't." He filled his pipe again and puffed at it. "I don't know what in thunder's wrong with this tobacco to-night," he said, and emptied it. He put his legs down.

"I guess that pig-headed fool has just about got to the dam," he said. "They'll be breaking his head in ten minutes' time, if it's breakable, Tremblay."

"*Oui,*" said Tremblay again.

Lafe crossed his right leg over his left, took it down, crossed his left over his right, took that down, and stood up.

"I guess I'll take a stroll up the road and try another pipe," he said.

Lafe's stroll was a quick one. As soon as he had left Tremblay's veranda he broke into a run up the hill road. As he panted at the summit, he heard the sound of wheels behind him, and presently he saw the curé's horse coming toward him out of the mist, the buggy faintly discernible in the light of the swinging lantern.

"Say, Father Lucy, would you mind giving me a ride into St. Boniface?" he called.

The rig stopped, and Lafe perceived that it contained Hermine Rosny as well as the curé. Her hands were clasped in agitation; her calm face was very pale. Lafe hesitated awkwardly.

"Jump in, Mr. Lafe," said the curé, pulling in the horse. "I am glad that we met. We need you. We, too, are on our way into St. Boniface. Jump in, and I shall tell you on the way."

Lafe entered. Father Lucien started the horse, urged it on, and turned to Lafe and said:

"Louis Duval has opened a saloon in Baptiste's old house, and M. Askew has gone to put an end to it."

"I guessed so, Father Lucy," answered Lafe. "I thought I'd take a look in there, in case there was going to be trouble. But I guess our men won't dare start a fight with Mr. Askew."

"Trouble?" questioned the curé sharply. "St. Boniface is full of the Ste. Marie men, and they are going to kill him."

"Good Lord!" muttered Lafe in horror. And he stared abjectly into the priest's

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face. He had heard such rumors, but he had discounted them too much. He had expected that Simeon might be there and put up a fight, and he had intended all along to be on hand, though he had persuaded himself that he had not. The priest's words and grim visage made him sick at heart.

"They have planned it for days," continued Father Lucien, as the horse slowed down perforce to make the descent toward the bridge. "Mlle. Rosny heard of it from M. Brousseau some time ago. She did not believe him. She thought he was—not jesting, exactly, but speaking wildly.

"This afternoon she learned of it again from little Baptiste, who asked her to warn M. Askew. Everybody knew that he would go into St. Boniface alone to stop the sale of brandy. Mlle. Rosny went alone to the camp to warn M. Askew, but he would not listen to her. She came to me twenty minutes ago. It is the work of devils!" he cried tempestuously. "And if they harm one hair of his head they shall go to prison for it."

"Brousseau could have stopped it!" shouted Lafe. "You telephoned?"

"M. Brousseau crossed to the south shore last night," replied the priest.

Lafe's eyes fell upon Hermine's face. She raised her own with an effort and met his bravely. Lafe saw in that look that she understood the meaning of Brousseau's absence. His heart leaped up.

He realized suddenly that her agitation had more than an impersonal cause behind it. He had known, he could not have told how, of Hilary's love for her; he had watched him enjoying the little drama that was in the making; in that look of Mlle. Rosny he recognized that she had awakened to Brousseau's infamy, that she would never be his.

"Then how about Mr. Rosny?" shouted Lafe.

"Mlle. Rosny has not been home since she saw M. Askew," explained Father Lucien. "There is no telephone in the château, and there was no time to seek a messenger."

Hermine Rosny spoke in a low voice.

"Mr. Connell, you will do all that you can to save him, will you not? And I think the men will listen to me," she said.

"I'll do everything that's in my power, *mamzelle*," Lafe answered. "I'll stand by him; I'll fight for him; but I guess he can't be in St. Boniface yet, and I know he hadn't a horse up at the camp. He's on his way. There's time, *mamzelle;* I know there is."

Not another word was spoken. The curé whipped the horse over the bridge, regardless of the shaking timbers. They began to hear the sound of shouting. As the rig dashed up the street toward the saloon the mob made way and gathered, chattering and gesticulating, about the entrance.

The curé leaped to the ground. Lafe followed. He tried to induce Hermine Rosny to remain outside, but she paid no attention to him. She followed the two men into the shanty, and the crowd shrank back, pointing within, but all afraid to pass the threshold.

Once more Lafe urged the girl to remain at the door. But she seemed not to hear him. As Father Lucien snatched down an oil-lamp from the ceiling and hurried toward the stable door, she pushed past him. Then Lafe heard a low cry, followed her with the curé, and saw her seated upon the floor, and Hilary, covered with blood, lying motionless with his head in her lap.

Her face was bent over his, and Lafe never forgot its tension and the anguish in her eyes.

Still supporting Hilary's head, she began tearing long strips off her petticoat. The curé set the lamp down on the floor and, kneeling down, raised Hilary very gently, muttering and shaking his head.

His clothing was so drenched with blood that it was difficult to determine where the wound lay. There were livid bruises about the mouth and cheeks, and on the forehead, as if his assailants had vented their rage upon the body of the unconscious man after giving him the fatal wound.

Father Lucien half turned him and uttered a sharp cry, pointing to the shoulder, from which fresh blood was welling. Lafe saw that Hilary was alive and breathing faintly, but his face was the color of death.

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The curé began to cut away the coat, then the lining, which adhered to the matted linen beneath.

"Bring some water, Mr. Lafe," he said, looking up and seeming to grow calmer.

Lafe hurried out, the few overcurious lumbermen scattering before him in panic. He called to them, but nobody seemed willing to comply with his appeals, lest he should implicate himself. But presently a window in a near-by house went up, and a woman handed out a pail, three parts full.

As Lafe returned with it the crowd slowly gathered about him and closed in behind him. He hurried into the stable. The curé, who had cut away the spongy masses of the shirt, took a strip of the girl's petticoat, dipped it in the water, and began to cleanse the wound, pursing his lips and shaking his head the while.

Lafe could see that the stab was deep, and it was still bleeding. Having washed it, Father Lucien made a pad and placed it in position, while Hermine, working with steady fingers, began to wind the linen strips round the chest. All the while she was working her face remained immobile, but when at last the wound was bound she broke down.

"It is my fault!" she cried in French. "I warned him, and I could not persuade him, and I rode away. I let him go to his death!"

Lafe noticed that, even in her abandonment, she held her body motionless, lest she should disturb the unconscious man whose head she held, and whose life seemed flickering away.

He had caught the meaning of the first words, which gave the clue to the sentence. The curé's hand fell on her shoulder. He spoke a few words, and Lafe, though he did not understand them, understood, and thought it significant afterward that, wild though her own words had been, and untrue, he did not deny them. His manner seemed to betoken a certain insight and knowledge of grief.

Hermine grew calm. Lafe bent down and gently raised Hilary's head from her knee. He placed his hands beneath the shoulders, while Father Lucien lifted the lower part of the body, and they carried out the stricken man to the rig.

The curé made a sign to Lafe to enter.

"You and Mlle. Rosny will drive to my house," he said. "As there is no room for me, I walk. I will give you the key, because my housekeeper is in bed."

"M. Tessier, do you think he shall be taken anywhere but to the château?" demanded Hermine Rosny.

There was a pride in her voice that admitted no opposition. The curé bent his head in acquiescence.

Lafe drew Hilary into the bottom of the rig and crouched there, supporting him. But Hermine sprang toward him. A little blood was leaking through the bandage. She began adjusting it hurriedly, and, meanwhile, Father Lucien turned toward the crowd, which was looking on in terrified silence.

"This is a bad night's work that you have done!" he cried. "You shall pay for it to the full, every guilty man!"

The foreman of the mill stepped forward. He was MacPherson, a decent workman, and, like many of the *habitants*, a descendant of one of Wolfe's Highlanders who had settled along the coast and perpetuated their names and something of their stanch character, if nothing else of their race survived.

"We are not all guilty, M. Tessier," he said. "I knew nothing of this until the attack was over, or I should have used every effort to prevent it. These people ask me to speak for them. They say that they broke down the stable door and dragged the Ste. Marie men away."

"The guilty men shall pay!" cried Father Lucien. "And if he dies they shall hang for their crime. You are all guilty," he continued to the crowd, which shrank away as he apostrophized them. "You let him go to his death and left him lying there."

"M. Tessier," protested the foreman, "I had only just arrived, and the attack took place a minute before you came. These people say that they wished to help him; they dragged the men away, but when they saw the blood they were afraid of being accused. There were only a few

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who sided with the attackers, and they are not here."

"They shall pay for it!" cried the curé again. "And listen further. You think it was M. Askew who brought the revenue officers to Ste. Marie. It was M. Morris who brought them, for they told me so."

These words created a sensation. An excited babble broke out. Hermine, who had just completed the bandaging, halted with one foot upon the step of the carriage and turned to the lumbermen.

"Yes, you left him to die!" she cried in scorn. "You were afraid, and you forgot that strangers who come upon our land are under our care."

Her eyes blazed as she went on to denounce them in ringing words.

"You have forgotten your ancient loyalty in these days. You have no memory of your seigneur and what you owe to him, still your seigneur, although you no longer grind and hew for him! You have forgotten!"

There was another movement among the crowd. Her words seemed to stir them more than the curé's.

"No, no, *mademoiselle!*" cried some of the older men. "No! We have not forgotten, *mademoiselle!*"

MacPherson came forward again.

"They say, *mademoiselle*, they did not know that M. Askew was the seigneur's friend," he said. "They thought that he had come to rob the seigneur of his trees."

"Well, if he did, what then? Are our enemies the less our care so long as we are seigneurs in St. Boniface?"

There was a renewed muttering. MacPherson spoke for the last time.

"They thought, *mademoiselle*," he said slowly, "that M. Brousseau's enemies were yours."

Lafe saw that the chance shot had found an unexpected mark. Mlle. Rosny staggered as if she had received a blow. She put her hand upon the wheel and leaned forward for a moment, staring into MacPherson's face. Then, without another word, she stepped in, took up the reins, and began to urge the horse, very slowly, along the road. The curé came to the side of the vehicle.

"I shall come to the château, then, *mademoiselle*," he said.

She did not answer him. Lafe, crouching over Hilary in the bottom of the rig, heard her sobbing spasmodically for a long time. Sometimes she raised her eyes for a moment from the road to look into the face of the unconscious man, and at the bridge she stopped the horse for a few seconds and looked at Lafe so despairingly that he answered her unspoken question.

"He is no worse, *mamzelle*," he said.

And that was all he dared to say. For Hilary's light breathing would hardly have stirred a feather on his lips, and Lafe, who had seen death often, knew that this simulacrum was not far from its reality.

The lantern had flickered out, but the moon was bright and the horse steady. The château was hardly farther than the curé's house, if one went by the road that branched off a little above the bridge; it had been made two years before, and ran through the heart of the forest, affording easy traveling.

Once, as the carriage swung round a bend, Lafe, looking back, saw the curé trudging behind. He heard Hermine still sobbing, and his own heart was heavy enough. He had not calculated that Hilary would reach St. Boniface so soon, and he had been too angry to wait to intercept him; but that was no excuse; he should have stood by him, and he had meant all along to do so without accomplishing his object.

He was still plunged in his despairing reflections when he realized that the drive was almost ended. The trees fell away, disclosing the Rosny château. The rig stopped before the door.

In front of it the seigneur and his old retainer were standing with anxious faces. An ancient carriage in the open stable door showed that the news had reached them, and that they had been about to set out on the same quest as the curé.

"You did right," said the seigneur to his daughter. "Now, *monsieur*," he added to Connell, and together they lifted Hilary from the bottom of the carriage. "Remember the steps. I will go backward."

They were inside the château, carrying

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their burden along the hall beneath the line of portraits into a room which had been a drawing-room in bygone days. It was furnished with spindle-legged tables and cabinets, but a bed in a corner showed that its use had been converted, probably because the upper part of the château was no longer habitable.

The old seigneur, in his brown swallow-tails, with large gilt buttons, was the sprucest part of the shabby old room. Everything else in it was faded, and by daylight it might have been seen that there was more dust than is considered hygienic in a sick man's bedroom.

Mlle. Rosny entered with her arms full of bed linen, diffusing an aroma of wintergreen. Lafe and her father got Hilary to bed. He was stirring now, beginning to toss his arms and mutter in delirium. The pulse was stronger, but the flush that had supplanted the pallor denoted fever. The curé came in, and in the girl's absence the three men looked at one another.

"I have seen men recover from worse wounds," said the seigneur.

"We must get a doctor at once," said Lafe to the curé.

"From Quebec, Mr. Lafe? He can hardly arrive in time to do much."

"There are doctors nearer?"

"None with the seigneur's skill."

"He has been a doctor?" inquired Lafe in astonishment.

"No, Mr. Lafe. A duelist," answered the curé ironically.

Hermine was already established at Hilary's bedside. There was nothing more that Lafe could do. He took his leave.

"*Mamzelle*," he said awkwardly, "I want to say I guess it's me was the only one to blame, not you. I ought to have stayed with him, and I went away. It wasn't up to you, *mamzelle*. I mean, it wasn't your business to save him."

"No?" murmured Mlle. Rosny, raising her eyes to his. And Lafe felt like a blundering fool.

"We'll save him," he said. "We can't lose him. I guess we all want him to live mighty badly."

He was half-way home with the curé before an odd thought came to him.

"I guess Father Lucy has a sort of knack of putting things across in his own way," he reflected.

CHAPTER XVII.

DREAMS AND DANGERS.

THANKS to a constitution inured by hard work and healthy living, Hilary improved rapidly under Hermine's nursing, aided by her father's skilled treatment of the wound.

Edmond Rosny knew the simples that draw out inflammation and allay fever, and, without having heard of antisepsis, he kept the wound clean with pure water from a spring that would have made its owner's fortune in any large city.

On the second morning Hilary was conscious; on the fourth the seigneur announced that the crisis was past, and on the ninth the patient was sitting up in bed and demanding solid food.

Lafe was the happiest man in the world when, at last admitted to the bedside, he asked and received absolution for his desertion.

"Mr. Askew," he said with tears in his eyes, "I ought to have stayed by you. But I never guessed you'd cover the ground so quick. I was waiting at the hotel when I ought to have been at the office. That's about all the excuse I got to make, and it ain't enough—"

He broke down there. Lafe had not spent more than fifteen minutes at M. Tremblay's, and he had gone there to return the landlord's rig which he had been driving; but he had not believed Hilary was in danger, and he had miscalculated the time.

"Now I've got some good news," he said when Hilary persisted in asking about the work. "We've started to drive the logs, and we'll have enough lumber for both Dupont's schooners and half a dozen barges in two or three weeks. The mill's working overtime, and the gang's back on the job at the old rates of pay."

"How did you work it?" inquired Hilary.

"I didn't do nothing, Mr. Askew. Mac-

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Pherson came to me and said the men wanted to start in again, and you ought to see the way they're rushing things through! I guess they feel that they haven't given you a square deal, and Mr. Rosny's been having a few words with them, I hear. Anyway, they know now it was Morris who tipped off the revenue people, in order to make trouble for you, and I guess this part of the country would be pretty hot for him if he was here. But he ain't. He's gone away."

"For good, Lafe?"

"Well, I couldn't say that of him," answered Lafe, with a flicker of humor in his eyes. "But he isn't likely to show his face here again, I understand. I hear he and Brousseau had a quarrel over the division of the plunder, and they almost came to blows over it. Anyway, they've split, and parted raging mad, and Morris has gone back to Ontario to teach 'em what he's learned about the lumber game up here. And McPherson has been working overtime, and it begins to look as if we'll win out after all."

This was the best possible news. It was now late September, and in a month's time the first snow might be expected, making possible short hauls through the woods, and an extension of the cutting area.

"It's too late this year, Lafe," said Hilary, "but next summer we'll introduce modern methods and double our output. We'll run a logging railroad into the woods, with steam skidders and log-loaders. If we can show people what sort of winter crop we've cut there'll be no difficulty about raising the capital."

"Well, now you're talking the way I like to hear," said Lafe enthusiastically. "I tell you, Mr. Askew, it just makes me tired to see them teams snaking the logs along the travoys, when a good log-loader would swing up three hundred feet a minute. I guess with a few improvements like that this country wouldn't be so bad after all."

So they discussed their plans until Hermine, coming in, drove Connell away. Hilary had asked him nothing about his assailants, and Lafe was glad to avoid the subject. It was Father Lucien who took it up later, when Hilary was convalescent.

He hesitated a good deal, but finally the truth came out. It would be easy enough to get the police down from Quebec, but the quartet would have to be laid by the heels before the advent of winter made further action impossible for months.

Pierre had disappeared from the neighborhood, although he had been seen near Brousseau's house after dark. He might be anywhere along either shore; he was a bird of passage and wanted in a dozen places for revenue offenses and for private vengeance. To look for him would be like looking for a mole in a pasture, and the police could hardly scour the wilds for him.

Leblanc was said to have gone into the woods for the winter to trap, having lost his small capital in dismissing his gang at Brousseau's behest; he was not likely to show his face in St. Boniface again till spring, in the curé's opinion.

Simeon Duval was running his saloon wide open, and swearing that, Hilary having assaulted him, he had struck with the knife in self-defense, while in a half-stunned condition. Little Louis, his brother, scared out of his senses, had been to see the curé to ask him to intercede with Hilary for him.

The chances of accomplishing much by police aid were not, therefore, hopeful. Hilary knew that his reputation, acquired through the fight with Pierre, would uphold Simeon's contention to the extent, at least, of enabling the man to escape with a nominal penalty.

It would be revengeful and undignified, and even ridiculous, to go to Ste. Marie and thrash Simeon, a much older man. On the other hand, it was still more ridiculous that Simeon should be brazening it out and selling brandy as if nothing had happened.

Hilary meant to put an end to Simeon's activities in a more satisfactory way than by pressing a charge of assault against him. With Pierre and Leblanc he would deal when the opportunity arose. He sent Father Lucien away with his forgiveness for Louis.

"But what strength! What power, *monsieur!*" exclaimed the curé in admiration, clenching his fingers over the muscles of Hilary's arm. "Do you know, *monsieur*," he continued, "I have often thought that a

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priest in such a district as this needs the muscularity almost as much as the earnestness. Do you believe, M. Askew, that it is possible to reach the hearts of the wicked by the application of physical means?"

"I haven't a doubt of it," answered Hilary.

The curé looked very thoughtful; he was evidently revolving the proposition in his mind, but he went without saying any more upon the subject.

To Hilary his convalescence was a foretaste of paradise. Edmond Rosny came into his room now only for formal visits, twice or three times a day. It was evident that he still cherished his ancient rancor, though his hospitality kept it in check; but it was wonderful to Hilary to see Hermine, whom he knew that he loved with all his heart, about his bedside all day long, and then about his chair, waiting on him, anticipating his wishes until he felt ashamed to be so helpless, her pride gone, her enmity as well.

She was very quiet in those first days, when the beauty of reviving life was stirring in the sick man's heart and casting its glamour about the world; remorseful, humble, very restrained. When Hilary learned of the part that she had played in his rescue, and thanked her gratefully, she could not meet his eyes.

Then came the first day on which he was permitted to go out. Leaning on Hermine's arm, he had gone into the warm sunshine and the crisp autumn air.

There had been no frost; it was an exceptional season; the birch leaves were now a flaming red, the asters had sprung up profusely everywhere, mingled with the goldenrod, and in swampy places the blue gentian showed between the grass spears.

They went out into the weed-grown garden at the back of the château, moving slowly toward the sun-dial there. They sat down on the stone garden-seat, riven by years and weather.

The garden had originally been laid out, more than a century before, in imitation of the formal gardens of the France of the period. The yew, which had once been clipped into symmetrical shapes and patternings, had long since grown into a thick and impenetrable hedge, the roses had become briers, the walks were hidden under weeds and the leafy débris of many autumns. Everywhere was ruin; and yet Hilary had the sudden, inexplicable sense of having come home.

Hilary turned to Hermine Rosny.

"The good-will goes with the trees?" he questioned.

She sprang to her feet, facing him.

"What must you think of me?" she cried.

"I think—" he began.

"That I knew of the plan to cut the boom. Yes, I did know, just half an hour before it happened. And I was on my way to warn you, but the shock of the fall made me forget. I hardly realized what had happened, and then it was too late."

Her words raised a great burden from Hilary's mind. He had never been able to reconcile the thought of her guilt with his conception of her; yet he realized now that his attitude had been that of one who condones rather than of acquittal.

"I was sure you could not have known—at least, I tried to make myself believe you did not know, in spite of your words," he said. "I do not want to ask you questions about it, *mademoiselle,* but I have been hoping that it was not Baptiste."

"Jean Baptiste? No, *monsieur,* he is incapable of such a crime. I do not know who it was, save that the man was employed by Edouard Brousseau. I had known that he was harboring some designs against you, and, when I came to believe that you were not so ill-disposed as he pretended, I implored him to abandon them. He would not, and that was why you thought me in trouble, when you met me on horseback.

"Edouard Brousseau had told me about the boom one-half hour before I met you. And that was what showed me the man's true nature. He made me think you were an avaricious, grasping American, come to plunder our country, but when he told me, boastfully, of his scheme, the picture was suddenly reversed for me. And he had spoken often of your death, and I had taken it in jest; but now I know that he himself set on those men who attacked you. I have not spoken to him since, and I hope I never shall again."

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"I presumed once," began Hilary quietly, though his heart had suddenly began to hammer, "to ask you a question about M. Brousseau that angered you. It was whether he meant so much to you." He took her hand in his. "I am going to dare to ask it again," he said.

"No," she answered in a whisper, looking down. "He never meant much, and now he means nothing."

Her breath came and went quickly as she spoke; she seemed afraid of the unspoken confession that he might read into her words; she tried to withdraw her hand, knowing that if she looked up she would be unable to hide her love; but already Hilary's arms were about her.

"I love you, Hermine."

She was trembling; he could not see her face, but she did not try to disengage herself.

"Hermine! Tell me—"

He was conscious of a stupendous fear; all the future hung upon that instant, and still she made no sign.

"Won't you look at me, Hermine? Won't you speak to me, dear?"

At that she raised her head and flung it back with a proud gesture, and looked into his eyes.

"I love you, Hilary," she answered clearly, with pride that forbade denial as much as coquetry.

And Hilary feared no longer. Everything was changed into joy that seemed to blaze about him, lighting up the day. He saw her shining eyes and the curve of her smooth cheek. He bent toward her, but she drew back for an instant and, looking at him steadily, said:

"Hilary, dear, I never gave my lips to him, or any one. I want you to know this. I always wanted you to know, when you had no right to know; when you used to meet me riding and see me with him, and when we had our quarrels in the woods."

And she raised her lips to his with all the frankness of her nature.

It was amazing that she had loved him! So little had been said, yet the same impulse had been at work in the heart of each of them, consciously in him, but in her against her will. For a long time that morning they forgot everything except their happiness. It was only when Hilary began to tell her of his hopes for their future that she remembered the obstacle in their way.

"Hilary, dear," she said, "do you know what this will mean to my father? He will never consent."

"We'll make him," said Hilary lightly. But the girl's face was tragic.

"It means the loss of the seigneurie," she said. "Did you not know that he"—she could not bring herself to mention Brousseau by name—"has a mortgage on the property? And he has been pressing me of late. For a long time he took my acquiescence for granted; then, when he found he had assumed too much, he began to urge me to—marry him. Otherwise he will foreclose—in less than two months, Hilary—in December."

Hilary grew grave in turn. He had known of this, of course, but it had never come home to him as a reality; the nearness of the menace shocked him, the alternative seemed too hard to be possible, and yet there appeared no escape from it.

Hermine slipped her hand into his.

"You must not think too hardly of me, dear," she said. "I had been brought up to believe it was my duty to sacrifice myself, if ever it needed be, for the sake of our inheritance. And I had never put the situation frankly before my mind; I had never seen—him—as he is until he stripped the mask from his own face. Let me tell you a little of my father's history, so that you may understand.

"You see, we Rosnys have been in Canada since 1690, and after Wolfe took Quebec the hope of regaining our land did not die out among our people. Then, when your country became independent, but failed to capture Canada, some of us thought that America had abandoned us. That is my father's view. He does not love the English, but he hates Americans. You don't know how cramped our lives are here, how old memories are preserved and cherished. My father broods over history, and his mind was warped by something that happened when he was a young man.

"He was high-spirited and hot-tempered, one of the dandies of Quebec, and they

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played a good deal, and raced a good deal, and did not live very good or useful lives. He fought several duels, and in the last he wounded a friend so badly that his life was despaired of. That changed him.

"He spent three months nursing him back to health, but the wound left his friend crippled, and afterward my father came back to the seigneurie and made it his home. He married my mother, who did not care for social life any more than he did then, and they spent more and more of each year in the château until she died. Since then we have lived here the entire year, except when I was at school abroad. And he has become more and more a recluse, reading his books and dreaming his dreams."

She smiled.

"He is very good and just," she said. "But he has let his dreams take hold of him too much and latterly he has got the idea that he has expiated his offense and thinks of returning to Quebec to play a part in political life. He does not realize how it has changed. He pictures the city of his youth, just as he lives here in these days, like a feudal lord.

"When my father was a boy that man worked on the estate, the son of a villain who had served my grandfather. He was clever and ambitious, and my father became interested in him and gave him an education. He repaid him by scheming to get possession of the Rosny inheritance. He wanted to be lord of the county.

"He set to work, won my father's confidence, and got him to invest his money in worthless companies, dangling before his eyes the hope of a return to Quebec, where my father was to play the great part that the Rosnys played in the days of the Intendants. When I came home from Paris, after my mother's death, my father was in his power.

"He tried to free himself by selling your uncle the timber rights. But he needed more money, for his enemy had him by the throat, and so he had to give him the mortgage. It expires in the middle of December and—that's all, Hilary, dear, except to say that although it was expected that I would marry him, I never in my heart intended to.

"It was all like a dream to me. I could never bring myself to consent. I put him off. And I wouldn't let him kiss me. It used to make him so angry. He hates you so much, Hilary, and once he was jealous of you and accused me of caring for you. That was what made me hate you.

"And he told me that you went to Ste. Marie to see some woman there. I knew that it could not be true. But he had hurt me about you and because of that I was ashamed to see you and tried to hate you more, and all the time I—I used to think about you, dear. I was ashamed—I am still ashamed—it angered me to think that I cared for you even then, and that my heart was at the mercy of a man I didn't know—of a stranger."

"Does he know of your decision?" asked Hilary.

She nodded.

"I told him on that day when he let me see his designs against you. Until then I had been hypnotized by my sense of duty toward my father. But, Hilary, remember this"—her cheeks were glowing, and she looked at him very earnestly—"if your love is as true as mine, you can rest happy in the knowledge that we love each other. Nothing can ever alter my love except the knowledge that yours is not true. And, however long the waiting may be, or whatever happens, I shall never marry him to save my father's lands, never, never, Hilary."

She was crying softly, her cheek against his shoulder. Now, in the light of Hermine's story, Hilary could interpret better the seigneur's rigid manner, his cold acquiescence in his guest's presence within the château, the courtesy that could not soften into friendliness so long as Brousseau held the whip.

But with the realization of this Hilary felt an indignation that swept away all doubts and bade him go to Rosny now, tell him the truth, defy his threats or pleading, and denounce the projected sale of his own child.

But when he began to speak of this to Hermine she started out of his arms in fear.

"It would kill him to know," she said.

"It is right that he should know, Her-

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mine. Nothing is to be won by delay, except regrets."

"My father will become your bitter enemy, Hilary. He will fight you to the end. He will do everything to drive you out of St. Boniface." Then, seeing his face harden at her threats:

"Listen, first," she said, as they began to make their way slowly back toward the château. "The other day, as soon as your recovery was assured, father went down to the mill and talked with your hands. He gave them a terrible scolding. He told them that they owed their duty to their employer before himself. It was not because he loved you, Hilary, but out of his sense of duty. There will be no more trouble with your workmen so long as they know you are our friend. Hilary, give me up, dear, and keep their good-will, and prosper—"

He laughed and put an arm about her.

"Hermine, with so short a time before us, is it worth while to drift? Besides, how can I accept the fruits of your father's intervention when I have come to rob him of his daughter and lose him his lands?"

She was convinced in the end, though she shrank from the disclosure.

"Who knows but that I can raise the interest, anyway?" asked Hilary. "How much does it amount to?"

She shook her head.

"It is the principal," she answered. "It is a hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

And that sum was beyond all possibility of repayment during the few weeks remaining. Only a miracle could save the seigneurie from Brousseau's grasping hands. The secret plotting and the schemes of a lifetime seemed on the verge of success.

For himself Hilary did not care, but, unjust though the sacrifice that Rosny had demanded of his daughter seemed, he pitied him. He was almost tempted to leave him another month of hope and happiness.

Yet the situation would be too unbearable, both for himself and for Hermine. And he resolved to act upon his intuition. But he did not calculate upon the swiftness with which the disclosure was to arrive.

One thing had begun to puzzle him. Why, with the seigneurie within his grasp, was Brousseau willing to spend so much to secure the timber rights? Valuable although they were, their acquisition did not justify murder.

He spoke of this to Hermine as they made their way homeward. She looked at him in wonder.

"I never thought of it in just that way," she answered. "I thought that it was just—just because he sensed that we were going to care for each other, and so wanted you out of the way."

"It may be so," reflected Hilary. "But I don't credit M. Brousseau with quite so much intuition as that. I fancy that there must be a deeper reason."

As he spoke Hermine stood still and clutched his arm in agitation. They had reached the side of the château. From where they had stopped the front of the building was visible. A rig was at the door, and Hilary recognized the horse as Brousseau's.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THREATS AND DECISIONS.

BROUSSEAU was standing in the room when they went in, facing the seigneur across the table. His rage, which he made little attempt to hide, was patent. It was pitifully clear that he held the whip hand and that Rosny had been attempting unavailingly to placate him.

"Come in, Hermine," he said, turning toward his daughter as the door opened. "You will excuse us, I am sure, M. Askew," he added.

"No!" shouted Brousseau, swinging upon Hilary, his face working with fury. "It will be just as well that your friend, the American, shall understand this situation. I am a plain man, and I speak for the benefit of any one who cares to listen.

"So you have been implicating me in your troubles with your men, eh, M. Askew? Because one of the workmen whom you have assaulted at various times draws a knife on you and gives you a little cut, while half-unconscious from your blows, you allege a plot on my part to murder you? I shall defend him to the last penny

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of my capital. And I warn you that if these stories—"

Without answering him Hilary turned to the seigneur. "If M. Brousseau's business is with me, no doubt you and *mademoiselle* will excuse me," he said.

"It ain't with you," retorted Brousseau, scowling vindictively. "I was telling you my opinion of you, the same as I'd tell any man, no matter who he was. It's with you, Rosny, and with Mlle. Hermine," he continued. "And it ain't private. Private? *Diable,* it's too public! It's making me the laughing-stock of the district.

"Every one's seen *mademoiselle* here and me riding and driving together. Now she won't have anything more to do with me. Why? I kept quiet as long as I thought it was just a whim of hers, but it seems it ain't. Why? Have I changed? Ain't I the man I always was? When I make a bargain I stick to it."

They stood facing each other, the old type and the new; the seigneur perplexed and disconcerted, Brousseau vulgar, aggressive and self-confident.

"M. Brousseau," protested the old man, "we Rosnys do not break our pledges. Whatever my daughter has contracted to do will be done. But this is hardly the occasion, or the manner—"

"I know it ain't," said Brousseau more quietly; and Hilary felt Hermine's hand, which had gripped his, relax its tension. "Maybe I forgot myself. I don't want to be anything but a gentleman in the presence of ladies, but it's hard, when everything has been arranged, to have it put back in the melting-pot—meaning you, *monsieur!*" he continued, sneering into Hilary's face.

"That's where you come into this business. When you were brought here and said to be dying, which seems to have been a lie, I kept quiet. But when people began to talk about *mademoiselle* here having thrown me over for him"—he was addressing the seigneur again—"why, it's more than flesh and blood can stand."

The seigneur looked pitifully distressed. His face, flushed with resentment at Brousseau's insolence, was molded into impotence by his conflicting impulses. He took a step forward.

"I am sure, gentlemen, that there exists no cause for disagreement which cannot be rectified," he said. "M. Askew is entirely guiltless of what you suggest, Edouard. Please remember that he is my guest. Hermine, my dear, I suggest that you and Edouard have a quiet talk together. I know that you hold your word as sacred as we Rosnys have always held our word."

Hermine was as pale as death, but she faced her father and Brousseau bravely.

"I never pledged my word to you, M. Brousseau," she said in a low tone. "You know it. You asked me to be your wife, but I never consented. You took a good deal for granted. You made a mistake. When you treacherously conspired to cut M. Askew's boom, and boasted of it to me, you lost whatever chance you had. And I believe you plotted his death. I shall never marry you."

Her voice, which had been low, rang out in scorn. Brousseau seemed to stagger. He caught at the table and stood staring at the girl incredulously, in fear, in fury; and his own face was whiter than hers. The seigneur sat down in his chair heavily. He looked at his daughter in bewilderment, as if he did not trust his hearing.

Then Brousseau rallied and laughed, and it was the most evil laugh that Hilary had ever heard. He addressed Rosny again, and as he spoke he continued to move toward him, until he was shaking his clenched fist in the seigneur's face.

"I understand it now," he sneered. "This fine American has been at work in the game. He ain't satisfied with stealing my lumber, but he's been spreading lying stories about me as well. I don't blame your daughter, Rosny. A woman is easily influenced by a new face.

"I don't blame her. I expect my wife to be true to me after we're married. I'll take care of the love. I ain't an unreasonable man. I can make allowances for human nature. I expect to mold her and to keep watch over her. Maybe she'd do the same with me. I don't say anything about a little affair before marriage, even when a girl's engaged. I guess she wants her fling, the same as us. But this is different."

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There was something so indescribably vulgar in Brousseau's statement of his creed, and yet so frank, that Hilary was too aghast to say anything. He could only stand, with Hermine's hand upon his arm, watching the man in a sort of fascination as he proceeded.

"This is different, Rosny," shouted Brousseau furiously. "He has been telling her lies about me. He came up here and started in to crush me. He wants to drive me out of Ste. Marie. By God, I'm not the man to sit down under that, Rosny. You know what I mean! I'll deal with M. Askew when the time comes. I'll speak to him again presently. I'm speaking to you now. Is she going to marry me or ain't she? You know what it's going to cost you if she goes back on her word!"

Rosny groped his way to his feet. The old duelist, who in his younger days would have fought at the drop of a hat, had been brought pitiably low, but not so low as Brousseau thought. His face was fiery red. He opened his mouth, stuttered, and pointed to the door.

"You may go, M. Brousseau," he said, striving to control his voice.

"I'll go, then," shouted Brousseau, moving toward the door. "You've had your chance. Don't come to me afterward and tell me that you're sorry. This American will be out of St. Boniface before the winter's over, and where will you be, wandering from door to door? I keep my word, in friendship or in enmity. For the last time, will she keep hers? If so, I'll forget. I'll call it a whim. I—"

"I shall never be your wife," said Hermine quietly. "You may spare my father further distress, *monsieur*."

Brousseau swung upon Hilary. He raised his hand threateningly.

"I'll get you yet, you dog!" he shouted.

"You coward!" she cried. "You coward, to threaten a wounded man, whom you would not dare look in the face in anger, were he well!"

Brousseau shrugged his shoulders and turned toward the door again. The malignant smile upon his face seemed frozen there, giving him the aspect of a satyr. Hilary tried to draw Hermine aside, but she stood confronting Brousseau with blazing eyes and heaving bosom. Yet it was the seigneur's look of agony and shame that was the most vivid part of the picture.

Rosny stood motionless as a statue, while Brousseau made his way along the hall. Hilary put his arms about Hermine to support her. Now that the ordeal was ended her courage was gone, and she wept uncontrollably.

When the front door of the château was closed Rosny turned and looked back into the room. He watched Hilary and Hermine with an inscrutable face. She withdrew from Hilary's arms and stood up at his side, looking at her father, who burst out in passionate words.

"It is all gone!" he cried. "Our home, our lands, our inheritance, even our name is gone. And it is well gone. The Rosny inheritance is nearly all to me, but our name, little as it means now, shall never become allied with that of the villain's son who has robbed me."

He raised his clenched fist and shook it in the air with a dramatic gesture, as if to register his vow. His face was strangely mottled with red and white, and he seemed to have aged ten years within ten minutes.

He addressed Hilary.

"I owe you my humblest regrets for what has occurred this morning, M. Askew," he said formally. "There was a time when I should have exacted requital in person. Now, alas, I cannot! I can only bear the blame. But as for you, *monsieur*, who came here in an evil day to cut my trees, you who are my guest, what have you to say who have brought this ruin upon us?"

Hermine started forward as if to protest, but her father silenced her with a gesture of his open hand.

"I ask you what you have to say, *monsieur?*" he repeated. "I ask you how you presume to justify yourself, you who are a guest in my home and have used that to turn my daughter from her faith?"

"I love her," answered Hilary.

The words seemed to sting Rosny to the quick. "You are presumptuous, *monsieur!*" he cried. "Perhaps you, too, thought that the heiress went with the land—or with the trees!"

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Hermine laid her hands appealingly upon her father's arms; he did not repulse her, but continued speaking as if he were unconscious of her.

"She shall never be your wife. You have done harm enough here, M. Askew. When you are well my *calèche* shall be at your disposal to take you back to your mill. And henceforward, unless you claim the last inch of your legal rights to cut about the château grounds—which I do not think you will," he added with reluctant justice—"let us see you no more. It will not be many weeks before we shall depart forever."

"Father, you are unjust!" cried Hermine. "We love each other. There exists no reason why you should speak in such a way to M. Askew. He is as good as any man."

"He is an American!" cried Rosny hotly. "This is not his country and our ways are not his."

"M. Askew had no making in dead and gone history," cried Hermine.

"He is not one of us, and he has wronged us," said her father stubbornly.

"Yet you were not too proud to pledge me to that other man, who is not one of us, either, except by race. Against my will. Without my knowledge."

"Enough!" cried her father hotly. "That is all of the past."

"The memory is not past. The shame is not past. You pledged me to him and placed the first link of the chain about my neck, hoping that the understanding, to which I was not a party, would gradually enmesh me, that I should become his wife and save your land for you."

The seigneur turned on her a look in which humiliation struggled with anger. He seemed stupefied by her outburst; it was quite clear that he could not understand the energy of her resentment. A hundred Rosny women in the past had been pledged so.

"For you, Hermine," he muttered. "Is it not yours? Have I so long to live then?"

Hilary interposed.

"M. Rosny, I love your daughter and intend to marry her," he said quietly. "I realize your feelings, and how great a shock this has been. You have invited me to depart when I am well. I am well enough to depart to-day. But I shall return to see her, and to plead our cause frankly with you. There exists no reason, no valid reason—"

"You shall never come here!" thundered Rosny, as if at last yielding to his repressed rage, and concentrating all his bitterness in his words. "The day when I sold your uncle my timber rights was the most evil day of my life. Go—if you are well—go! My *calèche* is ready for you. Go, in God's name, *monsieur,* and never let me see your face again!"

He raised his voice and shouted:

"Robitaille! Robitaille!"

From some place within the recesses of the château a feeble, quavering cry came back like the echo of the seigneur's call. And through the doorway Hilary saw the ancient serving-man come shuffling to obey his master.

And as he looked at him all his resentment died away. The two old men—Rosny in his brown swallowtails and the tight trousers strapped under his boots; Robitaille, in the faded butler's uniform—seemed playing a part in a scene laid in the long past.

Or, rather, they were the past. They had no place in the modern world, those ancient figures in their ancient dress, with their ways of a century gone by. They cumbered the stage of life, lingering there when their exits were long overdue.

They were unreal as fantom figures glimpsed in a wild dream. Pity for the two futile old men choked Hilary as he looked at them—at the seigneur in his wrath, and at Robitaille, bobbing and shuffling, with stiffened joints that made his movements those of a marionette.

He felt, too, the urgency of taking Hermine away before the same dream displaced her own world of reality.

She came up to Hilary softly and placed her fingers on his arm, looking into his face wistfully.

"You must go, dear, and not try to convince him now," she said. "It has been a terrible blow to him. He looks so ill, and I am afraid of what may happen to him. He is not capable of seeing things properly

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to-night. I shall come to you to-morrow and tell you—"

"Robitaille," said the seigneur, "M. Askew has decided, greatly to my regret, to take his departure this afternoon. You will have the goodness to pack his things and to prepare the *calèche* for him, with the new rug. You will drive him to the mill."

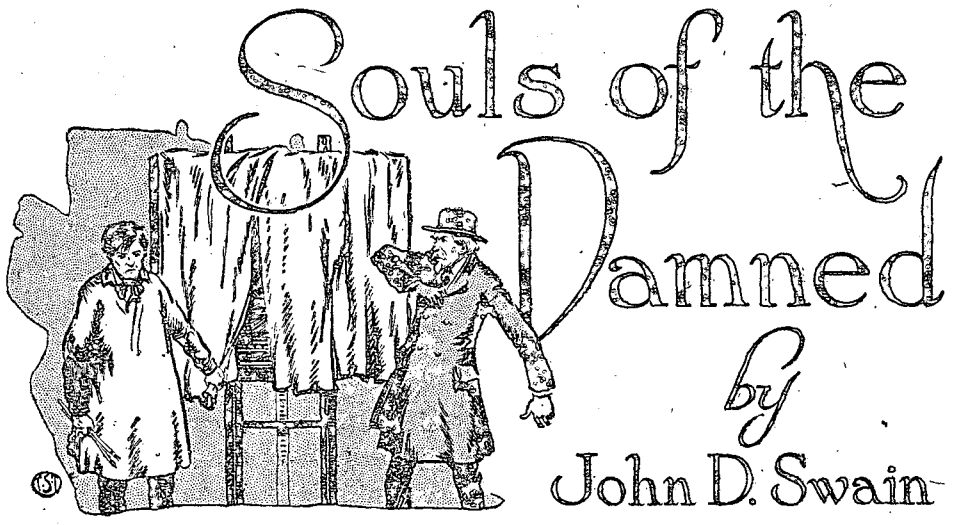
The old man bobbed again, muttered, and shuffled away. Hilary turned to Rosny and held out his hand. The action might have been ill-timed, but he felt only gratitude to the old man for his hospitality. He was conscious, too, of a deep-seated affection, almost admiration.

But Rosny did not seem to see the gesture. He stood where he had been, staring after Robitaille, one hand rising toward his spreading collar, and his face, which had been white and red, was purple.

Hilary turned away.

He had reached the door when he heard a sound as if Rosny was clearing his throat. Then Hermine cried out, and Hilary looked back to see her father sit down in his chair heavily. His eyes closed, his arms hung over the sides, his head fell on his breast.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



CARRINGTON had a canvas in the Salon while he was a pupil at Lemaitre's. I remember it well, for I saw it on *vernissage* day, and thereafter many times. It wasn't skied by the committee and always there was a crowd before it. The French government ultimately purchased it for the Luxembourg.

In general, good artists may be divided into two classes; those who make you think, and they who make you feel. Carrington did both. "Just Around the Corner," he called his painting; and the fact that he was a wonder in drawing and pretty fair in color doesn't in the least explain the appeal of it.

You saw a typical French village street, the houses linked one to the other, solidly constructed, thatched, with the cross of the old parish church brooding over all. In the middle of the street a dog lay sleeping in the warm sun whose light—the stippled luminosity of the impressionists—flooded the composition. In a doorway a fat baby rolled on his back and tried to get a toe into his mouth: a pursuit he would abandon later in life, but was surprisingly successful at now.

But the people! They were so still—so strained in their attitudes, as they gazed with fearful eyes at the corner just below—a corner empty of everything save the all-pervading sunshine.

Two or three women were flattened against the walls of the houses, their faces set in a terrified stare. An old man peered from a doorway, with the same horrified attention. And one young peasant was

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creeping on hands and knees towards the corner of the street, his head thrust out like a tortoise's, so that the sinews of his neck stood out like whipcord, and his eyes were the ultimate in tragic despair.

What was coming just around the corner, that quiet, sunlit, morning? You see, it could not have been strangers approaching—the sleeping dog told you that. Nor wild beasts. What, then?

I assure you, all day long there was a crowd about this picture. I used to watch them more than it; and many times, on returning half an hour later, I would find the same ones there. It was as if they were patiently waiting to see what nameless menace would presently appear "just around the corner." There was an eery, shuddery quality to it that was enhanced by the very restraint of the serene details.

A great future was predicted for the young artist. It always is, when his first work is admitted to the Salon. Many are never heard from thereafter.

I lost track of Carrington for a long time. I heard that various schools first claimed, then repudiated him. At one time he was regarded as a symbolist. He himself never lined up with any movement. He painted steadily on—the strangest pictures, the sort that people go to look at but do not buy. I once overheard a man say he would as soon live in a haunted house as one in which a Carrington oil hung.

Always the man's infernally clever draftsmanship overtopped his other technical equipment. Even here, a decadent strain showed. Often he would lavish upon the secondary details, the "props," an exquisite craftsmanship, a genius for texture and values that would make the still-life lads green with envy—only to paint in his central figure with a few powerful strokes, leaving it almost sketchy. Beardsley had this same trait.

Carrington never had another painting in the Salon and I never heard of him selling anything big. He eked out a living by doing book illustrations, and was, I imagine, rather miserable on the whole.

Like every other artist, he lived in the expectation of some day achieving a masterpiece, a work he could leave as his monument, something that would astonish the critics and, of far more importance, satisfy himself. He did not mind pot-boiling as long as he kept his *magnum opus* clearly in view. All artists live more or less on this orchid food, and most of them die leaving a garret full of pot-boilers with the masterpiece still unpainted.

At least this did not happen to Carrington. He did paint his ideal, a picture more eery even than "Just Around the Corner," and was satisfied with it. He was convinced that he had achieved his dream and that it could not be bettered. Then he emerged from the obscurity of his Paris atelier, rolled up the canvas and came home to reap his reward. He expected to be rich and famous, to paint many commissions, but never one to equal "Souls of the Damned," as he called his great work.

I ran across him in a café one night. His father, who had come up from Tennessee to visit him, was present. And what a figure the old gentleman was! Looking at him, you thought at once of dueling pistols beautifully chased, lying ready oiled in their mahogany case; of a serene belief that there existed no such thing as a bad woman; and of old daguerreotypes. You felt somehow that he would never admit to his friendship any man who questioned the Nicene Creed, or used a chaser.

Once more, before I sailed for Spain, I met Carrington, this time alone and greatly depressed. Naturally enough I inquired for his father—and he astonished me by saying that the old gentleman had returned home in a high temper, swearing that he would never again permit his son to cross his threshold nor his name to pass his lips.

"As bad as that!" I cried. "Cut off with a shilling?"

"It's not the shilling part, Bennet; there isn't much money left anyhow. It's because I've loved and admired him so—and he is all I have left in the world!"

"But surely you can fix it up—make concessions to so venerable a man, even though he be entirely in the wrong?"

Carrington shook his head gloomily.

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"Not with him; you don't know him! You see, I showed him my 'Souls of the Damned'—you must come to see it—and he looked at it a long time without speaking. Then he turned to me—he was perfectly calm—and told me that if I did not destroy it he would disown me. That was all."

"But—but I don't understand!" I exclaimed. "What sort of a picture is it, Carrington, to affect him so?"

"It's the best thing I ever did, or shall do, Bennet. I'm staking all I am and hope to be on it. Why, man! I painted my own blood, my own soul into that canvas!"

"Even so; to humor the old gentleman, wouldn't it be justifiable to lay it aside for a bit and let him think you had destroyed it? You are still a young man, while he—well, he can't be with you many years longer."

"Destroy it?" There was a quality of horror in Carrington's voice. "I could even do that—although I shall never paint its equal—but can't you see? It's his mind; broken, you know. Even were I to burn it, he would only be appeased for the moment. On some other absurd pretext he would break with me again. It's hard, but I've got to make up my mind that I've lost him. When brains like his begin to go, their obstinacy lives on."

I did not think of Carrington for months after that, as I was busy painting in Granada. When I returned with a steamer trunk full of sketches, I found that "Souls of the Damned" had acted as a strange leaven in artistic circles.

The singular part was that one had so little that was of a definite nature to put one's finger on. Artist friends who admitted having seen Carrington's painting refused to discuss it. Others vehemently denied having seen it at all. There was some talk of a model to whom the artist had got himself engaged—a handsome animal, but with the intellect of a simian—who had broken off the affair because he refused to repudiate "Souls of the Damned." And the committee of the Art League had refused to hang it in their Winter exhibition.

Out of this welter of rumor and innuendo I did isolate two or three tangible facts. There was the case of Simon Levine, the antique dealer, a man of unsavory reputation and questionable integrity. Twice he had been in trouble with the customs authorities, and he had fought a dozen lawsuits with clients over some of his fake masterpieces.

Levine had heard of Carrington's work and, always quick to mint publicity, had offered him five hundred dollars for the loan of "Souls of the Damned" to exhibit in his shop for one week.

It is some evidence of Carrington's pecuniary condition that he accepted the offer. He knew the old rogue and detested him.

Levine visited his studio to see the painting, and just what took place between them was never known. But "Souls of the Damned" did not appear as advertised, although Levine paid the five hundred dollars. He was square, that way. Once a bargain was struck, he would abide by it. But it certainly must have hurt in this case!

I knew Levine pretty well, and my curiosity was sufficiently roused by now to send me over to his shop to get his story.

"Five hundert tollars!" he wailed, after I had explained the object of my call. "And for not'ings! In the fire I should as well burn it."

"But tell me about it," I urged. "Why didn't you take it? Is it—er—*salacious?* Something the anti-vice people would row about?"

Levine glared at me disgustedly from beneath puffy lids.

"Vice?" he exploded. "Now, my dear Pennet, you are an artist. You know as well as I do that a photograph may be impure—a painting, never! It is but realism—yes? But I tell you this 'Souls of the Damned' might hang in a synagogue, so far as that goes."

"Then why—?"

He shrugged fat shoulders and waved deprecating palms.

"I am Levine, a *connisoor!*" he declared. "They call me a hard man. Maybe. I enjoy myself. On this earth I live only once. But I tell you, some time I

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die. And sooner as I die with that on my soul—to bring peoples to see such a work—I give up not five hundert but five *t'ousand* dollars!"

Nor could I get more out of him.

"Go see for yourself," he said. "Why ask me to exblain what you haf but to visit Carrington to look at already?"

Which was reasonable enough, of course, and what I intended to do. But first I wanted to learn all I could about what had happened.

When Levine canceled the exhibition he had advertised and actually forfeited five hundred dollars, a clever reporter wrote up the story in lurid style. He played up the quarrel between Carrington and his father; described the tearful scene in which the pure lovely young girl had begged her affianced to destroy the wicked picture, and on his refusal had torn off her diamond engagement ring and cast it dramatically at his feet; emphasized the fact that even Levine would not sell his soul for five hundred dollars; added and embellished every studio rumor he could dig up, and made a corking good story of it all.

So good, in fact, that the *Era* instructed Hartwell to devote a full page to Carrington's masterpiece in the Sunday number, with a cut of it and a likeness of the artist. And Hartwell had gone to the studio with his camera, had interviewed Carrington and seen "Souls of the Damned"—and flatly refused to have anything to do with it!

Nothing like this had ever happened to the *Era* before. They were obliged to fill in Hartwell's page with what was practically boiler-plate, and the managing editor promptly fired him.

Now Hartwell was a particular friend of mine. He had been with the *Era* for fifteen years, and was the highest salaried art and dramatic critic in town. He was middle-aged, blasé, the author of half a dozen books, a man as little likely to be swept off his feet as the Statue of Liberty from her pedestal. I knew that he had quite lived up to his income, and could ill afford to give up his place, nor expect to secure as good a one elsewhere. Therefore to Hartwell I went to slake my curiosity once and for all.

I found him, not in the smart apartment hotel where he had lived for some years, but in a standardized bungalow in a little Jersey town. He answered my ring himself—and I am sure I caught sight of the vanishing Mrs. Hartwell with checked apron and duster. A Japanese butler had admitted me on my last call.

Hartwell carried a book in one hand, a finger keeping the place; with the other hand he greeted me cordially—almost defiantly—and ushered me into a tiny library which the bungalow miraculously included, and on whose panel boards I recognized the best of his fine collection of artists' proofs and holograph letters.

"And now," I asked, after we had successfully despatched the customary preliminaries of friends after a long parting, "how about 'Souls of the Damned?'"

My host threw out his hands in a gesture of helplessness, his rare smile flashing upon me.

"So that has pursued me clear into the Jersey jungle? Of course, you would have heard about it! You know Carrington pretty well, don't you?"

"So-so," I nodded. "Never at all chummy. Always thought he would do something unusual—and apparently he has?"

A non-committal expression crossed Hartwell's face.

"You know, of course, that I have left the *Era?*" he asked.

"Yes: what are you doing now?"

Hartwell shrugged.

"Living on my royalties and growing roses; just marking time. You know, at my age one doesn't fall into another berth like mine with the *Era*. They often keep on old fellows from force of habit—but they don't hire them."

"Just why did you quit, old man?"

"Why, I fancy the story you must have heard covers the facts. I left Carey in rather an awkward situation—insubordination I suppose you might call it. Had been there so long I'd almost forgotten that I was an employee. I've no grievance."

I looked him steadily in the eye. He

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did not seek to avoid my gaze, yet seemed vaguely uncomfortable.

"But why didn't you give Carrington's painting a write-up? If it was a false alarm you should have said so, at least, and so put an end to all this idle gossip."

"The trouble was," Hartwell said quietly, "it wasn't a false alarm! Had it been, I could have turned off a bit of hack-work. I've done enough in my time."

"Then?" I encouraged.

Hartwell smiled in a tired sort of way and shook his head.

"It's no use, Bennet. You wouldn't understand. It's something like this: every man, good or bad, comes at length to some wall he knows he must not scale. We say, crudely but expressively, 'one must draw the line somewhere!' And 'the line' may be hard and fast or easy and loose. In Carrington's case I came to that point. You know me for an easy-going creature, tolerant of my own and other men's weaknesses, not critical of religion, but rather bored by it. But here was my crisis. I had to draw the line or damn my own soul—if I have one."

I frowned.

"You mean to tell me that conscientious scruples prevented you from publishing a critique of 'Souls of the Damned?'"

"Call it that if you like," Hartwell replied curtly.

"But what *is* this painting? What's it all about? You've seen it."

"Yes—I've seen it, but I can't describe it. It's title does that, once and for all."

"You never found any difficulty in describing a picture before, not even when the futurist stuff came in," I objected.

"True: possibly I'm getting old. Hardening of the imagination, perhaps."

"And you always laughed at the idea of morality or immorality in art."

"I did—many a loud hee-haw," Hartwell readily agreed. "What of it?"

"I don't in the least understand," I sighed. "And anyhow, do you suppose the painting won't be written up by someone? It's bound to be exhibited somewhere."

Hartwell went through the motions of washing his hands, the familiar gesture of Pilate and Lady Macbeth.

"It's no go, old fellow!" He closed the interview. "I can't describe 'Souls of the Damned.' My vocabulary doesn't cover the situation. And I wouldn't if I could! But there's nothing to prevent you from going to see it yourself, is there? Come down next June and see my Killarney roses," he invited. "And as often before then as you can stand for the Sabine farm stuff."

I puzzled over his attitude on the train ride back to the city. It gave color to all the silly rot I had heard about Carrington's picture—but left me as much in the dark as before. Well—I had run down every rumor, only to bump into a blind wall at the end. What the devil *had* Carrington done, anyhow! There remained nothing for me to do but to go and see for myself.

I have been so often disappointed when on the trail of a sensation that but for the singular attitude of Hartwell, sane, cynical and self-possessed, I should have expected this to be another wild goose chase. Chambers of horror, spiritualistic séances, an apache dive I had visited in Paris, the first Cubist exhibition—what a succession of anti-climaxes, from my boyhood days on!

I began to feel at last I was to be rewarded. A painting which had produced so profound a revulsion, such nameless horror in people of such divers mentality, must surely have in it the divine touch of madness.

Adam told me where I would find Carrington's studio. Carrington lived for a long time on Levine's five hundred dollars and had no other assets that Adam knew of. He had even heard that Carrington was destitute. Couldn't seem to paint a thing since "Souls of the Damned" was finished.

No, he hadn't seen it himself. Didn't know Carrington personally, but meant to have a look-see one of these days. Glad to be able to give me his address—fancied the poor devil would be pleased enough to see a friend! Everyone deserted him—hard sledding, *et cetera, et cetera.* Our talk drifted to other things.

So, a day or two later, with gray fog muffling the street sounds and sights, I

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found myself climbing the dirty stairs to Carrington's attic studio, and presently was reading in the dull yellow light the soiled card tacked onto his door. A voice bade me enter.

The great room was cheerless enough, with the fog drifting in through an open window. In the far end, behind a rickety screen was a cheap iron bed and washstand. And on the bed lay Carrington, dead.

But what startled me even more, was the figure of Carrington's father standing by his side, grief and pride struggling in his face for mastery.

"I am so sorry," I murmured inanely. "I came to call on your son—and to see his picture."

The senior Carrington bowed with a dignity that was at once kindly and compelling.

"Pray, do my son this last honor," he said. "It is my wish."

Vastly uncomfortable, I turned to the canvas I had come to see. There it stood—the one conspicuous object in the bare and barren room, apart from poor Carrington himself.

I moved slowly toward where it hung on the wall, shrouded by a black curtain, the title plate just showing on the edge of the frame beneath. I seized the cord almost with hesitation.

Truly the stage was set for a climax. The silent man lay on his bed, face turned toward me and eyes half open, as if curious to know what I would think of his strange composition. The casual noises of the street came to me muffled by the pall of fog; a rat which squeaked in the wall at my elbow sounded loudly.

Impatient of the suspense, I jerked the curtain back so sharply that it parted from its string, and hung like a funeral weed across the upper corner of the frame.

With a gasp I started back from it—for Carrington had painted it entirely out with a thick coat of bister! The dark, shiny mess was still wet to my touch.

It seemed to me that a faint chuckle echoed through the room. It was but the ghost of a chuckle—such as might come from the dry lips of Thothmes III. in the museum, were it to be discovered that he was not Thothmes at all, but some one else: say, the queen's favorite.

Yet when I turned nervously toward the living and the dead there was no change, save indeed—and this may have been a fancy—the pride in the old gentleman's face seemed to have overmastered the grief!

THE NECKLACE

ABOUT her throat my kisses cling,
Each gold and small and sweet to see;
Linked in a little row, they sing
A love-song to her ceaselessly.

Each little golden kiss is set
Near, very near, by night and day,
That she may never quite forget
Who placed them there and went away.

My little kisses, guard her then
And love her. When I come again,
Your kingdom shall be overthrown
By kisses she has never known;
So is it written in my heart.

But, wee ones, stanchly play your part,
And for the sake of one away
Guard, guard her well by night and day;
Upon her throat lie soft and light
By day and night!

Mary Carolyn Davies.

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Riddle Gawne

by Charles Alden Seltzer

Author of "The Two-Gun Man," "The Coming of the Law," etc.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FIREWORKS.

A SECOND or two dragged while Baldy grasped at the significance of Gawne's words. They had caught him off his mental balance. He had been elated with the prospect of victory; he was facing the specter of defeat and sudden death. His face blanched; his right hand dropped to his pistol holster. He had long yearned for an opportunity to test the traditional quickness of Gawne; mentally—and sometimes verbally—he had scoffed at men of the Bozzam outfit who had been ridiculously slow with their weapons when confronted by Gawne.

Now—with his right hand gripping the stock of the pistol at his hip—he saw the barrel of Gawne's gun glinting over Meteor's mane.

A paralysis seized him—a ghastly, cringing dread; and, like Jess Cass, on the day of Kathleen Harkless's coming to Bozzam City, he could not have drawn his weapon for the riches of the world. It was a physical impossibility.

"Pull it, Baldy!" came Gawne's voice mockingly, urging him to hazard his life on that slender thread of chance. "No?" he said, still gently, as Baldy's hand came up—higher and higher—until it was above his shoulder. "Well, then—slope!"

He sat quietly in the saddle, watching, while Baldy, his forehead clammy with sweat, his face still a ghastly white, mounted his horse and raced toward the desert. Then he grinned at the others.

"I think Baldy wanted to go all the time, gentlemen. But he wanted, like some women, to have the last word. Do you men want to go now, or do you want to wait and see the fireworks?" he added, as he saw the members of the vigilance committee approaching.

"Fireworks?" queried Lowery.

"We're wiping the Bozzam ranch off the map," said Gawne.

"Goin' to burn it?" gasped Lowery.

"The committee insists," said Gawne.

Baldy did not ride far. Once he was screened from sight by the gnarled chaparral growth fringing the pasture, he pulled his horse to a slow lope, skirted the chaparral, and made his way deep into the timber where Lowery had seen the vigilance committee.

Concealed there, he watched the burning of the buildings, drawing farther back so that the fierce light of the flames might not betray him to the eyes of his enemies.

This story began in The Argosy for September.

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And when, by the dying glow, he saw the other members of the Bozzam outfit depart, riding southwestward, he sneered at them and the members of the committee, jammed the spurs into his horse, and rode in the opposite direction, blaspheming.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE CAPTURE.

HAME BOZZAM had heard nothing suspicious in town. Baldy—who might have told him—had been warned off; the two or three merchants with whom he had spoken were friendly to Gawne, and could not have been induced to tell Hame Bozzam anything that would put him on his guard.

Gawne's persecution of Reb Haskell he attributed to the personal bitterness between the two. And even then, when he had seen Haskell, the sheriff had declared he would "Stay in town an' call Gawne's bluff."

Haskell had changed his mind later, though Hame Bozzam had no inkling of his departure until, in the office at sundown, he had seen Gawne, gun in hand, searching for Haskell.

Leaving Miss Harkless, Bozzam had veered from the Harkless trail, cutting off over the plains at a tangent in order to avoid riding through town. That impulse kept him from discovering the preparations that were being made by the vigilance committee; as it had also left him in complete ignorance of the fact that several Diamond Bar men, led by Billings, had reached town.

Hame Bozzam was aflame with rage and desire. During the scene in Haskell's office he had not failed to note the fire in Gawne's eyes when he had been looking at Kathleen; and the expression in the girl's eyes had convinced him that she still loved Gawne.

He had not been misled by Kathleen's wrathful accusation to Gawne; but had detected the tremor in her voice, and he knew she had meant that Gawne was a fool for being jealous of her — for doubting her. Nor could he fail to appreciate the significance of Kathleen's bitter denunciation of himself on the trail after leaving town. The veil of hypocrisy had been rent; further pretense would be futile.

When Bozzam reached the H-B, the men were at supper in the bunk-house. Bozzam had made plans for a night raid on a distant cattle ranch, but that prospect had dwindled in importance since sundown. Sticking his head in the bunk-house door, he called Nigger Paisley out. Later he sent back word to the outfit, by Nigger, to postpone the raid until he returned. Then, accompanied by Nigger, he rode away.

Again he avoided going through Bozzam City. He and Paisley cut through the timber grove, made a détour through a valley, following the river; emerging from the valley far on the other side of Bozzam City, and striking the big basin long after the Diamond Bar men had ridden through it on their way to town.

Kathleen and the colonel had ridden slowly. The colonel, knowing Hame Bozzam's plans for the night raid, had delayed much. He did not want to reach Bozzam City until after the Bozzam outfit departed for the night ride; for, knowing Hame Bozzam, he was certain that punishment, sure and swift, would overtake him. He had given Bozzam his word, and Bozzam's wrath would be cruel and bitter.

Slipping, like shadows, into the luminous mist that swathed the big basin, the two fugitives rode far off the trail, screening themselves as much as possible behind the nondescript clumps of brush that dotted the floor of the valley.

They had not taken the plains trail—which would have led them close to the Diamond Bar ranch—veering off, instead, toward the river, at Kathleen's request, to take advantage of the shadows of the trees and brush that grew thick near the stream.

The girl was pale and anxious. She had seen the passion for possession in Hame Bozzam's eyes when he had threatened to ride to the Harkless ranch that night, and she knew he would come.

She had come into the country confident, full of joy over the prospect of seeing

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her father—riding through the sunlight and peace of a section of world that she had loved at first sight; she was leaving it miserable, terror-stricken, cringing with fear, flitting out of it through somber shadows, to escape a danger that, she had no doubt, she had invited.

Disillusioned, crushed, dispirited, she was stealing away from two men—one whom she had trusted, and who had violated that trust; and another with whom she had tried to play, confident of her power to discourage him when the time came.

She did not blame her father entirely. Nor did she blame herself too much. Everybody had tried to victimize her, and she had only defended herself as best she might, allowing always for the unwise and compelling impulses for revenge that she had yielded to.

She kept seeing Gawne as she rode—as he had appeared in Bozzam City; as she had seen him standing in the doorway with the Le Claire woman's arms around him; and as he had stood in Haskell's office, with the passions of murder and jealousy in his eyes.

Of course she had seen the jealousy—any woman who has been in love with a man can analyze that bitter, soul-racking glare; but it had served him right, and she wasn't a bit remorseful for that, for he had no right to permit the Le Claire woman to follow him to the Diamond Bar — or to stand brazenly in a doorway, making love to him.

And yet, as she rode, tears of regret over her departure came into her eyes.

They reached a narrowing neck of the basin presently—a slope that led between flanking buttes, upward toward a level slight but high enough to throw their bodies into bold relief on the sky-line. There was no verdure here behind which to conceal themselves; the slope was nothing more than a barren ridge of sand dividing one section of the big basin from the other.

They raced their horses up the slope and across it—it was a full half-mile to the descending slope—and clattered down the other side into the sheltering shadows of the far basin, trembling and apprehensive of having been seen.

Their rapid, furtive glances into the luminous mists of the basin ahead of them had told them nothing. But, knowing that Bozzam must come this way if he came at all—unless he chose to take the desert trail, which would lead him through Sunshine Gap, and which was a hazardous trail at night—they swung off the trail again into the shadows of some tall sage and willow and aspen, and rode cautiously, keeping a keen lookout.

They were half-way through the basin when they saw two riders approaching. Kathleen caught a glimpse of them as they swooped over a slight rise; then they disappeared into a depression, only to reappear instantly on the crest of another rise.

She and the colonel were riding behind the sheltering screen of some sage. It was the only concealment the place afforded; and beyond it was a barren stretch which swept, clear and level, to the point where she had seen the two riders.

They drew their horses to a halt behind the sage; the girl's hand trembled as it rested on the colonel's sleeve; her face, in the warm, mellow glow of the moonlight, was ashen with terror.

Breathlessly they watched the riders. Kathleen recognized them as Hame Bozzam and Nigger Paisley, and her low gasp brought a muttered warning from the colonel.

She saw Bozzam scan the sage clump as he came abreast, not more than fifty feet distant. Twice he looked at it, and each time he shifted his gaze to some distant spot. Then, a third time, he turned his face toward them, and the girl groaned, for she saw him reining in his horse.

Kathleen heard Paisley laugh lowly as he pulled up, a little distance beyond Bozzam, and turned in the saddle to look back.

"What's up?" he questioned.

"Nothing, I guess," answered Bozzam. "Only I thought I saw something in that sage—over there."

"You're overanxious," said Paisley, and the sound of his voice made the girl shiver.

Bozzam grunted, and seemed about to

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urge his horse on—when the colonel's horse heaved audibly.

There was a horribly tense and terrifying interval, during which the girl felt the chill of a clammy paralysis stealing over her. And then, just as she was beginning to yield to a hope that the men had not heard, Bozzam drove the spurs into his horse and plunged toward them.

The girl cried aloud in desperate terror and slapped her horse with the quirt, sending it, snorting with surprise and pain, racing out of the concealment of the sagebrush and over the level toward Bozzam City.

She heard her father's horse coming after her; heard Bozzam laugh deeply with cold, taunting mirth. It never occurred to her that the men would shoot—or she would have stood. Her thoughts were centered on the possibility of reaching Bozzam City, where she might find help to keep Bozzam off.

Her horse, she felt, was doing nobly; and her hopes were high. Then she heard a shot. Startled, she turned in the saddle just in time to see her father reel, clutch at his horse's mane, miss it, and plunge heavily from the saddle down into the grass of the level.

Her wail of concern and horror fell on a flat, dead silence. She saw Nigger Paisley sitting on his horse, bending over a little to look down upon his victim—she knew then that it had been Paisley who had done the shooting—a vindictive grin on his face. She saw Bozzam, not more than a dozen feet from her, swing his horse toward her. The man's face was alight with savage exultation.

She swayed—she knew she was going to fall—for the level around her was dancing and reeling with dizzying, sickening convolutions. But she felt a horse lunge against hers; an arm went around her; she revived and fought frantically to free herself.

But Hame Bozzam, seeming a giant in size and strength, held her in a mighty embrace, so that at last she could not move. So she lay, panting, powerless, and impotent, in his arms, looking up into his face, breathing bitter imprecations, her soul revolting at the horrible passion swimming in his smiling, triumphant eyes.

CHAPTER XXXI.

PAISLEY'S ORDERS.

FOR a long time Kathleen seemed to be subconsciously aware of a smooth, undulating motion, and of a monotonous creaking of saddle leather. She knew she must have fainted, for before she became conscious of the undulating motion she had not been conscious of anything.

Then, when a recollection of what had happened began to steal over her, she struggled, to find herself still in Hame Bozzam's arms.

Bozzam was riding—she on the saddle in front of him; they seemed to be going toward Bozzam City. Indeed, while she was still trying to fix the locality in her mind, Bozzam's horse clambered up a rise, and she saw they were at the edge of the level that reached to the Bozzam ranch-house.

Bozzam halted at the edge of the level; Kathleen saw Paisley riding near, and her own horse led by the man.

There was a dull, red glow in the sky in the direction of the Bozzam ranch-house, and she heard Bozzam and Paisley exclaim profanely as they saw it.

"It's the timber!" said Paisley.

"It's back of the timber," cursed Bozzam. "It's the house! The damned fools!"

Kathleen felt his muscles stiffen; he jerked the reins, and the horse lunged forward, nearly unseating her; she was snapped back against Bozzam with a force that almost jarred the breath out of her. Just as suddenly she lunged the other way—forward; for Bozzam had jerked the horse in before he had traveled a dozen feet. She heard Paisley exclaim, and she looked forward into the red glow. Framed in it—rather, looming out of it—distinct and grotesque, she saw a horseman racing toward them.

She saw Bozzam and Paisley nervously sweep their gun-sheaths as they watched the rider. Plainly he saw them, for he

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came tearing over the level, riding an undeviating line, waving his hands.

When he pulled up within a bridle's length of them, the girl saw that his face was working with excitement. She had never seen him before; but she heard Hame Bozzam grunt:

"Baldy!"

Kathleen listened while Baldy told his story. He spoke in short, sharp, breathless accents.

"Hell's broke loose!" he said. "Riddle Gawne is on the prod an' killin' mad! His damned eyes is like an iceberg with a fire behind it! It's a clean-up for fair!

"Riddle's run Reb Haskell out of town! He's got a bunch of vigilantes with him—an' some of the Diamond Bar outfit! They're hell-bent for trouble—an' gittin' it! Riddle buffaloed Lowery an' the rest; they done et out of his hand. Sloped clean, without makin' a peep! They's twenty-five—"

"What's the fire?" demanded Bozzam, his voice hoarse. He gulped the words.

"They ain't a stick of any buildin' standin'!" declared Baldy. "She's swept as clean as this here level."

And now that he had told his story, Baldy's excitement began to abate. He drew a deep breath and tugged at his collar.

"I reckon we ain't got no more home than a coyote," he added, and grinned mirthlessly at Bozzam. "I done tried to plug Riddle, but somehow my hands forgot where my guns was. I knowed you'd come this way, an' I wanted to put you wise a few. Riddle's lookin' for you; you're a gone coon soon's he clamps eyes on you! He means business, Bozzam!"

It gave Kathleen a wild, fierce delight to feel Bozzam squirm behind her. She knew now that though he hated Gawne, he feared him more than he hated him. She felt him shiver during the silence that followed Baldy's words.

Looking with vindictive contempt at Nigger Paisley, she saw that his face was ghastly. While she watched him, he turned his horse and dropped the reins of the led animal. She saw his lips working.

And then she heard Bozzam's voice—she hardly recognized it. He was almost breathless; she felt the heave and shudder of his lungs. Terror—the kind *she* had felt while awaiting discovery by him, some time before—had seized him; she knew it.

"Well," he said, attempting a laugh that had a horrible, hollow and grating insincerity in it; "I've been getting tired of this country, anyway. We'll slope, and let Gawne run things. We can't play the vigilantes' game with no outfit."

There was a mad joy in Kathleen's veins—a leaping, surging riot that made her reel in the saddle. Gawne was jealous! She knew it, now! This sudden avalanche of reform that he had started was not the result of concern for Bozzam City's welfare. It was too vicious for that! It was a personal expression of his feelings—of his hatred for Hame Bozzam, and of his jealousy!

Her own passions were singing, attuned to his. For she felt a lust to murder—Paisley. And had she been free she would have ridden directly to Bozzam City, to get Gawne, and have him wreak vengeance upon Paisley for the shooting of her father.

She had a hope that Bozzam would release her, now; for she felt that he meditated flight, and she would be an incumbrance. Her heart sank, then, when she hear Bozzam speak gruffly to her:

"Get off! You'll have to ride your own horse from now on."

She scrambled down, thrilling with the joy of freedom that swept over her as her feet touched the ground. She climbed into the saddle on the led horse, pulled the reins over its head, and, leaning forward over its mane, slapped the animal sharply. She had not ridden more than a dozen paces when Bozzam's big horse flashed alongside, and Bozzam's hand went out and seized her bridle. There was a pale, sneering grin on the man's face.

"No you don't!" he jeered. "You're going with me!"

He motioned to Paisley. Kathleen fought, but Paisley, grinning maliciously, tied her hands behind her; then lashed her feet to the stirrups, leering at her.

Bozzam's manner had changed; she saw a malevolent devil glinting in his eyes when

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he surveyed her, after Paisley's work had been done.

"Gawne's raising hell—is he? Well, we'll make this night damned interesting for him!" He turned to Baldy. "You and Nigger hit the breeze over to the Diamond Bar and get Jane Carter. We'll meet you at the Harkless ranch. Get a jump on you?"

Baldy did not move. He cleared his throat.

"Meanin' to steal the kid away from Riddle?" he asked.

He laughed shortly in response to Bozzam's nod.

"Nothin' doin' in that line—absolutely nothin'! I ain't rilin' Riddle no more'n he is riled. Your little Baldy ain't exactly pinin' for the mourners!"

Bozzam's face bloated poisonously. For an instant Kathleen thought he would draw his pistol and shoot Baldy down. But finally Bozzam laughed sneeringly.

"Slope, then!" he commanded; "get back to the gang and beat it!"

Baldy backed his horse away, watching furtively, a cold grin on his face. When he wheeled the animal he ducked, bending low, and racing zigzag fashion over the level until he was beyond pistol range. Then he sent back a derisive "so-long!"

Bozzam turned to Paisley.

"It's up to you, Nigger!" he said sharply. "Get Jane Carter!"

Paisley's horse lunged with the command; Kathleen watched him as he swept downward into the ghostly mists of the big basin. Then she turned, to see Bozzam grinning at her.

"Come on—my dear," he said. "We'll be going, to—to where we're going!"

He seized her horse by the reins, still grinning, and led it down the slope into the basin, following Paisley.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BOZZAM PAINTS A PICTURE.

BACK in the basin, Nigger Paisley paused momentarily, near a clump of sagebrush, to look downward at a figure that lay, doubled queerly, in the long grass.

The figure had not changed its position since Paisley had seen it last. But there was a savage impulse in Paisley's heart to make it sure, and he drew his heavy pistol.

But something in the ghastly pallor of the upturned face caused Paisley to shiver with repugnance. He sheathed the pistol, without firing it, cast a glance at the riderless horse that was unconcernedly browsing nearby, and rode onward.

Later, following Paisley's trail, Hame Bozzam and Kathleen passed the sage-clump—but Bozzam had veered off, so that Kathleen could not see the place. She searched for it, with dumb, pitiful curiosity and eagerness; but without success. There was so many clumps of sage.

But when she followed Bozzam over the sand ridge she knew she had missed the spot, and she pleaded with Bozzam to return, that she might give her father what help she could—if he were alive.

Bozzam laughed brutally.

"He won't need any help. Nigger didn't bungle that job!"

He rode steadily on, not heeding her pleas and protests.

Yet Paisley had bungled the job. Half an hour after Kathleen and Bozzam had passed, the colonel stirred and groaned. Then he opened his eyes, dazedly surveying the star-dotted heavens, rolling his head from side to side, in an effort to get side glances at the mist-screened objects around him.

It was a long time before he remembered, and then he turned over, every movement bringing forth a retching groan. Somewhere in the back, near the spine, Paisley's bullet had struck him; his legs were a dead weight of paralyzed, unwieldy flesh. They did not seem to belong to his body at all; and when he finally got to a sitting position he had to lift them around: they dangled, flopping here and there, when he tugged at them.

Only his torso was alive—and that racked with agonizing pains.

The colonel's moral weakness had been his curse. It had dominated his life, it had warped his soul. He had always been a coward; always been afraid; afraid of

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punishment—of blame; afraid that what had happened to him, would happen.

It had happened; Bozzam had punished him. And it was not half so bad as he had pictured it—as he had feared it would be. He had suffered this punishment thousands of times, in his imagination; the exquisite torture of it had shriveled his soul; he had suffered it in fear, in dread and in hideous horror. Thus, many men experience the pangs of death—suffering its agonies before it comes.

The colonel laughed harshly, with horrible, mirthless cacklings that sent the denizens of sage and chaparral thicket scurrying into deeper concealment—that so startled a coyote, which for a long time had been watching from a far mesquite clump, that he barked in terror and slunk away.

There would be no feast there—the man was far from being dead—or helpless. That laugh could belong only to some one in whom the instinct and the ability to live was strong and dominant.

And the colonel did want to live—he was determined to live. He knew Hame Bozzam. He knew that Hame Bozzam had his daughter, and he was determined to do what he could toward thwarting Bozzam.

That would be little or much, depending on his physical strength. Of moral courage he had plenty, now. He glowed with the vigor of it. It was a strong, vital element that gave unthought of power to his muscles, and he crept on his hands through the grass toward his horse with a rapidity that brought satisfied grunts out of him.

But when he came close to the horse, the animal raised its head, flecked its ears erect, and looked at him in astonishment. Then, before he could speak, it snorted in fright, slashed at him with both hind hoofs, and trotted twenty paces away.

He pursued it doggedly. Again he approached it—again it retreated from him. And again he crawled after it, persisting, determined.

An hour passed before he succeeded in getting close enough to the animal to make a snatch at the dangling reins. Then he missed them, and the horse moved off again.

The colonel had to stop many times. He was growing weaker, and his lungs were not equal to the terrific strain. Yet he persisted; and when at last he made a desperate lunge for the bridle-reins, and felt his hand close around them, he was so spent that he plunged headlong into the grass and rested there many minutes before he could raise his head.

The horse, trained to the ethics of range work, did not try to escape after the colonel's hand closed on the reins. He stood, docile enough, patiently awaiting the colonel's pleasure.

The colonel waited long. Then he raised himself to a sitting posture. This brought his head to a level with the stirrup. He grasped the tough, bowed wood and tried to drag himself erect.

He failed, because his legs would not support him; and sank back to his sitting posture, sweating coldly. He tried again, and whined dismally as he sank down, defeated.

Then, with a last heroic effort, he raised himself high enough to grasp the rope that hung from its ring near the pommel of the saddle, pulled it loose, threw a hitch over the pommel; tied the other end of the rope securely under his arms; bunching his coat so that the rope would not chafe.

Then he squirmed around and unbuckled the bridle reins, and holding the leather in hand lashed the horse with it, and urged him with his voice.

Nigger Paisley's task was to his liking. He rode fast until he got near the Diamond Bar ranch-house; then he went forward cautiously. First, he rode slowly near the corral fence and scrutinized the exterior of the bunk-house.

The door was not closed. Still, there was little significance in that, for ordinarily, a bunk-house door was always open. Yet there were few horses in the corral—not the number there would be were many of the Diamond Bar men in the bunk-house.

Baldy had said that a number of the Diamond Bar men had gone to Bozzam City, with Gawne; and in that case, since Gawne would want all the men he could

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conveniently get for such work as he had set out to do, it seemed reasonable to suppose that he had taken every man from headquarters. The others might be at some distant cow-camp, and if that were the case they might as well not exist at all.

Paisley peered into the open doorway of the bunk-house. Inside, by the moonlight that streamed into the windows, he could see the bunks—all empty. He strode in now, gun in hand; to emerge an instant later, grinning broadly.

In the corral he found Ginger. It was little trouble to rope the beast, throw saddle and bridle on it—and while in the stable he noted that Ginger's saddle was the only one there. This discovery brought another grin to his face.

Slipping Ginger's bridle rein through a staple on the stable door, Paisley strode toward the ranch-house. He found the side door open, and stood there long, listening, before he hazarded the action of pushing the door further ajar. And then he saw a faint streak of light gleaming through a crevice in another doorway, stabbing the darkness of the room into which he was looking.

Paisley moved, with patient stealth, through the outside doorway.

The red marauders that, six years before, had stolen into the ranch-house to pillage and murder, could not have been more silent than Paisley. With his eyes at the crevice in the inner doorway, Paisley grinned. Jane was sitting at a table in the dining-room, her back to the door, a lamp on the table beside her, reading. She was alone.

The course of study prescribed by Kathleen Harkless, Jane was following faithfully. The colonel's daughter might have had something to say in objection to methods, but Jane's energy and application would have won her teacher's applause. The girl had persisted.

Not understanding the differences that had come between Kathleen and Gawne, she had cherished a hope that one day they would be adjusted. And in the mean time, she would continue to study, having in mind a surprise for her teacher when at last she would resume her responsibility.

But it was growing late, and she had studied much. Her eyes were tired and her vision hazy. Aunt Emily and Uncle Lafe had gone to bed—hours ago, it seemed to Jane; and she was beginning to envy them.

She placed her book on the table, stretched, yawned, and started to rise. A breath of night breeze set the lamp to flickering—and she knew the door had blown open. She stiffened at a rustling sound behind her.

But Paisley was upon her.

A big bandanna handkerchief, slipped unerringly and roughly, over her mouth, stifled the terror-shriek at its inception; the cloth was lashed so tightly at the back of her head that her frenzied clutches could not dislodge it.

And then her hands were seized, pinioned at her sides with savage ferocity; and she was lifted and carried, struggling, and kicking, but without having made a sound that would apprize Aunt Emily and Uncle Lafe of her predicament, out into the open.

Hame Bozzam and Kathleen had been at the Harkless ranch for an hour when Paisley arrived with his captive. Kathleen was still lashed to her horse: Bozzam had tied the animal to a porch-post while he had gone into the ranch-house.

Kathleen had watched him emerge twice with provisions, which he rolled carefully into the slicker at the cantle of his saddle; and the eloquent significance of this preparation appalled her. It meant that Bozzam meditated a long ride.

But she said nothing to him; her contempt for him exacted an ignoring silence from her. But her dread of him had grown, and she watched him, with a covert and terrorized fascination.

But when she saw Jane coming, with Paisley—and knew that Paisley had been successful—she sat, white and limp in the saddle, unable to utter a sound.

It was not until she saw the huge handkerchief around Jane's mouth, drawn so tightly that it seemed the girl must suffocate, that she could make her voice answer its office. A wave of compassion and wrath made her words come chokingly. They were directed to Paisley:

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"Take that rag off her mouth, you beast!" she said.

Paisley grinned insolently at her. He did not offer to comply.

"Take it off, Paisley," came Bozzam's voice, from the doorway, in mild mockery. "The lady's wishes are to be respected."

"If that is so, please untie my hands," said Kathleen. "And bring the child to me. You have frightened her almost into hysterics!" The handkerchief had been removed from Jane's mouth and the girl was moaning and crying incoherently.

Bozzam came close to Kathleen and scanned her face sharply. He saw that her concern for Jane was real and deep.

"All right," he said shortly. "However, there's no occasion for her fears—nor yours. We are not going to harm you."

"Release us, then," said Kathleen.

"That is impossible," laughed Bozzam, lowly. "I want you with us—both of you—for reasons that are—my own. I may tell you when we get to Williams's Cache. Ever hear of Williams's Cache? It's an outlaw rendezvous in some hills in the desert, south of here.

"I've many friends there. Blacky Williams, himself, is a warm personal friend of mine. I've cultivated Blacky—for just such an emergency as this. I've sold my cattle through Blacky, and put many a dollar in his way. In fact, Blacky and I are partners—in a way. He's asked me time and again to join forces with him. But I preferred to play the game alone.

"Until Jeff Gawne butted in I had things pretty much my own way in Bozzam City. I'd like to stay here longer, but there's no use. Bozzam City is getting too big. So I'm going to take Blacky up, and join him. Williams's Cache is a right pretty place—it's a green oasis in the desert—good water, trees, fair houses: its quite a town. The law doesn't get that far.

"You'll like it—you'll be a queen there. I can give you everything that any woman could wish for. That applies to Jane, too. I'm going to adopt Jane. She will be our child."

"You mean—" gasped Kathleen.

"That you are going to be my wife—if there is such a thing as a parson in Williams's Cache. If there isn't—well, what's a little law to do with marriage, anyway?" His laugh sent a shiver over Kathleen.

But she turned from him and set about consoling Jane. The appreciation of her own danger was dulled in her concern for the girl. Jane, clinging to her, filled her with the high instinct of protection. And there was hope—hope that Gawne, discovering Jane's abduction, would ride abroad in search of her.

There was Gawne's vengeance to be considered, too—and she did consider it; and the whiteness of her face was not caused entirely from fear and dread of what Hame Bozzam might do to her and Jane; some of the pallor was a result of a divination of what Gawne's passions would be when he set out to find Jane and to hunt down her abductor.

He was her only hope, now; and she would have forgiven him everything now—if she could have seen him sweeping toward her over the dark level from the Diamond Bar ranch-house, on Meteor. She would even forgive him for that torturing instant when she had seen him kissing the Le Claire woman.

So, nursing her hope—whispered to Jane—she made no demonstration when Bozzam and Paisley finally mounted their horses and moved away from the Harkless ranch-house, leading her and Jane down a shadowy trail toward a still more shadowy future.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE FOOL!

THE vigilantes spent the greater part of the night in the vicinity of the Bozzam ranch-house. There was much work to be done, in addition to that which had already been accomplished.

The committee had taken a keen interest in the departure of the Bozzam outfit, several of the men keeping an eye on the Bozzam men until they were observed to veer south, after leaving the ranch, as though while riding they had agreed upon a destination.

"They're goin' to Williams's Cache," de-

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clared a vigilante. "We ain't seen the last of that outfit, by a long shot!"

That remote contingency, however, did not depress the spirits of the committee. In the glare of light from the burning buildings the men "cut out" Bozzam's cattle—dividing them equally among the owners who had recently missed cattle from their herds; playing no favorites; making the awards with scrupulous exactness.

The horses in Bozzam's corral fared likewise, for if all had not been stolen in the vicinity, it was felt that Bozzam would never be able to make a legal claim for them. And assuredly they did not belong to Bozzam.

When the committee split up—a number of the men driving to their home ranches the cattle and horses apportioned to them—day was beginning to break.

The gray mists of the big basin were writhing in fleecy, translucent billows, in preparation for their aerial journey, when Gawne, on Meteor, swung up the sand ridge near where the colonel had been shot down by Paisley.

Gawne's lips were hard-pressed with a vicious satisfaction. He had uprooted an evil that had been a reproach to his conscience for many days. And in serving the community he also had served himself.

He was jubilant; filled with a vindictive triumph. He attempted no self-justification for the effect the campaign against Hame Bozzam would have on Kathleen. Hame Bozzam was getting what he deserved; Kathleen deserved the humiliation and pain that Hame Bozzam's banishment would give her. Any faithless, frivolous woman deserved punishment.

It was not an heroic frame of mind to be in; but Gawne never felt further from enacting the rôle of self-effacement and sacrifice. He had read of such things; there had been times in his past life when he had practised a modified form of them—when, if he could have been assured of woman's honorableness, he would have gone to extremes.

But that was before he had discovered certain things about his one-time fiancée, Marie Calvert; it was before he had found his brother murdered, and his brother's wife unfaithful; it was before the bitter cynicism of the black, abyssmal passion of hatred had gripped his soul.

He was back now to where he had been before the coming of Kathleen Harkless; the proof of her perfidy had aroused all the violent, ruthless, elemental passions of his nature. He fed them, as he rode, linking Kathleen Harkless and Hame Bozzam; promising himself that his vengeance was not yet completed.

He was half-way through the second section of the big basin when, far ahead of him, he caught sight of a moving dot. The dot was off the Diamond Bar trail; it seemed to be even a little distant from the Harkless trail—which veered in the basin and swept off toward the river.

He was too far away to observe in which direction the dot was moving; though he had a black hope, after he watched it for a time, that it might be Hame Bozzam returning to his ranch, or to what was left of it.

His lips twisting crookedly, Gawne swerved off the Diamond Bar trail and cut across the basin toward where the dot was moving. Farther on, he was able to make out the outlines of a horse; but he could see no rider. Also, he observed that the horse was going in the direction of the Harkless ranch.

Glowering his disappointment, though yielding to an eager curiosity to see what was meant by a riderless horse going through the basin, he spoke sharply to Meteor, and the horse went forward with a long, swinging lope that ate up the distance with amazing rapidity.

Gawne's curiosity increased as he proceeded. It was not until he was within half a mile of the riderless horse that he noticed that it seemed to be dragging something. And then Meteor flashed forward in a burst of speed that equaled anything he had ever before attempted.

At first, viewing the object from a distance of perhaps a hundred feet, Gawne thought it was a puncher, thrown, and unluckily tangled in his rope; but a second look, as he leaped Meteor alongside, told him the truth; and with a sharp exclama-

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tion he flung himself out of the saddle, to the man's side.

Gawne's face was white and set when he rose from the colonel's side half an hour later.

He had done what he could—the process entailing several heart-breaking rides to the river for water—bathing and rubbing, and the applying of various emergency methods to restore respiration and circulation—during which the colonel's suffering was acute, even in his unconsciousness.

But Gawne's efforts had succeeded at last; though it was a pitifully broken and mutilated human figure that finally opened its eyes and stared in bewilderment at him.

It was long after the colonel opened his eyes before he recognized his rescuer. Then he smiled wanly. And, bending over him, answering the appeal in the colonel's eyes, Gawne heard, through macerated lips which could be moved only with agony, the story of the attempted flight, the meeting with Hame Bozzam and Nigger Paisley, the shooting, and the abduction of Kathleen.

More, the colonel whispered, with painful effort. It was the colonel's second accession of moral courage. His glazed eyes pleaded dumbly with Gawne for forgiveness; and the blazing, widening eyes that held the colonel's seemed not to see him at all—they were stern, cold, implacable; the fire in them was the glint of flame on transparent ice.

"Go on!" said Gawne, when the colonel paused for breath. He spoke through his teeth, and his breath seemed to clog in his throat.

"That's all, Gawne," mumbled the colonel. "Except that Kathie ain't to blame—not one bit. I lied to her—about you; and about Hame Bozzam. I told her you'd always been friendly with the Le Claire woman—that you'd brought her over to the Diamond Bar because you wanted her. I told her the Le Claire woman was only working for Hame Bozzam. I—I made it black for you.

"And Blanche Le Claire did, too. She came over to see Kathie. She told Kathie you'd sent for her—that you belonged to her. She don't like Hame Bozzam—Kathie doesn't. She hates him, Jeff. She wouldn't marry him; she wouldn't have anything to do with him; she wouldn't have looked at him—if it hadn't been for what I and the Le Claire woman and Hame Bozzam told her. Save her, Jeff, won't you? You can do it!"

Gawne did not answer. He swung the colonel up in front of him, and sent Meteor on his way through the basin. Not once during the ride did he seem to hear the colonel's incoherent babbling.

The sun was up when he rode up to the Diamond Bar ranch-house and deposited his burden on the porch. Aunt Emily and Uncle Lafe met him there, and took charge of the colonel. Then, without a word, Gawne swung back into the saddle and sent Meteor leaping toward Bozzam City.

From Bozzam City, later, other riders went scurrying to cow-camp and ranch-house, repeating the story of the outrage and recruiting a larger and a more vindictive vigilance committee. About noon a posse of grim-faced men rode out of town, skirted the ruins of Bozzam's ranch, swept through the chaparral where Gawne had pursued Nigger Paisley, and began to eat into the hot dusty desert that stretched into the southern haze.

They would find Hame Bozzam and his men at Williams's Cache, was the opinion of every man in the posse—and they would leave him there, to stay always.

At the head of the posse rode a white-faced penitent who spoke not at all, but whose brain kept repeating a phrase that greater doubters than he had reiterated with much the same agony of remorse:

"Fool—fool—fool!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE SEARCHER.

WITH Nigger Paisley, a sinister figure in the moonlight, leading the way, Kathleen and Jane riding behind him, followed by Hame Bozzam, captors and captives rode down the river trail until they came to a narrow gorge that intersected the stream.

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The gorge was dry, but its high, towering walls, seeming to narrow at the top, so that only a thin streak of the luminous sky showed above, created a darkness through which they rode—it seemed to Kathleen blindly. Paisley, however, appeared to be well acquainted with the trail. Kathleen could hear him ahead of her; his horse clattering over the rocks of the cañon bottom; her own animal followed—rather recklessly, she thought, for it stumbled much.

Hame Bozzam's horse was never very far behind her. Several times Bozzam spoke to her. But she would not answer him; she had determined never to speak to him again.

They got out of the gorge presently; Nigger Paisley's figure grew from nothing to a black blotch; then became a shadowy outline; and at last, as the cañon widened, Kathleen felt herself settling back against the cantle of the saddle, and knew they were mounting a rise.

Then Paisley became distinct. Other objects began to take on form. Up and up they went, the light growing until, with a quickening of the pulses, Kathleen realized that they were traversing the trail that she and Gawne had taken on the day he had kissed her.

Later, however, they swung off that trail and began to ascend the shoulder of a mountain. Here the light was clearer, and Kathleen could see Jane and Ginger quite plainly. The girl was riding stiffly, with a proud set to her head, as though she had recovered from her fright and was determined to treat her captors with the contempt they deserved.

And yet, despite the rigidness of the girl's poise, Kathleen noted that she seemed to take a keen interest in her surroundings. Later, on a high level, where Kathleen's horse was forced close to Ginger because of a sharp doubling of the trail, Kathleen saw the girl looking at her with a smile. Still later, while Hame Bozzam and Paisley were conferring at a little distance, the significance of Jane's smile was explained.

"They're taking us to Sunshine Gap!" whispered the girl excitedly. "Daddy will find us!"

"Bozzam mentioned Williams's Cache," Kathleen reminded her.

"That's in the desert," answered the girl. "There are three trails to it, from the Diamond Bar. One is straight on down the cañon to Fillet's Wells—a town; the other way is back through Bozzam City; and the third trail is through Sunshine Gap, over the gray ridge. Don't you think daddy will hunt for us?"

"For you, of course," smiled Kathleen. "He won't know about me—nor care."

Jane frowned.

"Daddy's got awful solemn again—since you don't come any more. He likes you. Why did you stop coming?"

Kathleen flushed; she could not let this child into her secret.

"Paisley made some noise—when he took you, of course?" she asked quickly.

"Not much," said Jane, pouting at the recollection. "I—I tried, awfully hard, to make a fuss, but I don't think anybody heard me. Aunt Emily and Uncle Lafe didn't get up." She looked sharply at Kathleen. "You are wondering if they will miss me. Daddy will. He'll be after us—on Meteor. And he'll kill Hame Bozzam and Nigger Paisley. For he hates them like poison!"

They were urged on again, in the same formation in which they had traveled before; Hame Bozzam grinning blandly at them.

"Holding a confab, eh?" he laughed at Kathleen's back. "Well, that's good; you can let off considerable steam that way. And you must be about ready to explode."

He rode close to her and peered intently at her.

"You're standing it rather well; you're not nearly ready to explode. Beginning to understand that things might be worse?"

She averted her face. This action seemed to inflame him, for his horse lunged against hers, and leaning over, he crushed her to him and kissed her fiercely on lips, cheeks, and throat, letting her go free presently, and laughing deeply as she lashed him verbally.

"Spirit, eh?" he said. "I told the colonel you had it!" He laughed again. "We

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stop at the Carter shack in Sunshine Gap to-night, my dear. The devil himself couldn't get within half a mile of Williams's Cache at night. Just the right sort of solitude in the Gap for honeymoon purposes—eh?"

"You—you devil!" she breathed hoarsely, filled with a wild longing to slay him—to do something that would drive the fierce passion from his eyes.

Kathleen had had one glimpse of Sunshine Gap, at a distance, on the day that Gawne had told her he loved her; but when, descending the mountainside to-night, she saw it in the mellow moonlight—peaceful, slumberous; surrounded by the mysterious hills; the river, like a ribbon of quicksilver, gleaming and shimmering in the ghostly light—she caught her breath with a gasp of delight that almost dispelled her dread of Bozzam.

When they got to the cabin, Bozzam swung down and untied her feet, which had been lashed to the stirrups.

"I'm sorry we had to do that," he said.

She made no reply, but sat in the saddle, swinging her legs back and forth in an endeavor to restore the circulation to them. She had determined that when they should release her feet she would try to escape.

She had seen the gray ridge on the other side of the river; she knew that it rimmed the desert. For several minutes after Bozzam had untied her feet she sat, pretending that she was not yet able to dismount. At a moment when Bozzam appeared to be giving his whole attention to the cabin, she spoke softly to her horse and urged it gently away.

She was a dozen yards from the cabin when Bozzam turned and saw her. He ran, leaped on his horse, and pursued her. He caught her at the water's edge, pulled her from the saddle to his own, calling Paisley to get the riderless horse.

"You'll not try that again," Bozzam assured her.

Reaching the cabin, he dismounted, carried her into the cabin, and barred both doors—one from the outside as he went out. She could hear him talking with Paisley, and she waited anxiously for them to put Jane into the cabin with her.

They did not put Jane in. From a window Kathleen caught glimpses of them at times, as they moved about outside. Breathlessly, remembering Bozzam's words, she searched with something with which to bar the doors and the windows.

A table, a chair, a bench, and a cupboard which had once been used for the storage of dishes, were all the articles that could possibly be used for her purpose, and so she shoved and lifted them against the door that Bozzam had barred from the outside. There was nothing for the windows; and she would have to trust to the bars that were already on the door that was fastened on the inside.

Then, nerveless, quivering inwardly, every muscle taut with the tension of desperation, she walked from door to door; from one window to the other, dreading, vigilant, and sleepless.

Once, remembering that she had heard Bozzam lock only one door from the outside, she stole to the other, took down the bars, and tried it. It, too, was fastened from the outside—Bozzam must have secured it while she had been moving the furniture against the other door.

The windows, she noted thankfully, after a long, fearing examination, were not large enough to permit Bozzam to get into the cabin through them.

But Bozzam did not trouble her that night. Twice, from a window, she saw Bozzam ride across the river, climb the gray ridge, and stand for a long time, seeming to watch something in the desert. Three times she saw Nigger Paisley do likewise.

After Paisley's last trip to the ridge she overheard the two talking near the door. Their voices seemed to be freighted with concern.

It must have been long past midnight when she heard a light tap at one of the doors—the one that Bozzam had gone out of. She waited, frozen with dread, for the knock to be repeated before she answered. Then she heard Jane's voice:

"Please open the door, Kathie. It's cold out here, and I have no blankets. They said I might come in with you."

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Receiving the girl's assurance that neither of the men were within reach of the door, she removed the barricade and permitted Jane to enter. The girl was shaking with cold. By chafing her hands and huddling her close, Kathleen was able to impart some warmth to her. And then, with chattering teeth, Jane revealed the reason for Bozzam's and Paisley's interest in the desert.

"They've seen some men riding on the desert," said the girl. "They think they're some of the vigilance committee. Williams's Cache is in that direction, and Bozzam and Paisley are afraid to go. Bozzam said he thought he'd wait until the men came back."

Kathleen had replaced her barricade at the door. They mounted to the top of the creaky table, and there, huddling close together, they passed the night. Both must have slept, for when Kathleen again looked out of one of the windows the dawn had come. And Jane was rubbing her eyes yawningly.

The bright light of day banishes many of the terrifying recollections of the darkness, and—and there were the men that Bozzam and Paisley had seen in the desert. There was hope there!

Shortly after sunrise Bozzam knocked on the door.

"Everything all right in there?" he asked gruffly.

Kathleen did not answer; but Jane called:

"Yes. Go away!"

They heard him try the door and shove against the barricade. The latter held. Bozzam's deep laugh floated through the door to them.

"Locked out, eh?" he said. "Well, that's all right. You want some grub, don't you?"

"No!" said Jane spitefully.

Bozzam chuckled.

"Rather peeved, eh? Well, I'll leave some grub on the door-sill. You can get it when you think you need it."

Later they saw Bozzam and Paisley go together to the gray ridge. They took Ginger and Kathleen's horse with them. Seizing the opportunity, Jane and Kathleen opened the door, found the food that Bozzam had left for them, and went outside to eat and stretch themselves in the warm sunshine. Bozzam and Paisley, Kathleen noted, watched them closely, Paisley standing near the water's edge, facing them, while Bozzam devoted his attention to the desert.

When Kathleen saw the men start on the return trip, she went into the house, urging Jane to do likewise. The girl refused.

"It's too stuffy in there," she objected. "I'm going to stay out in the sun. Besides, I'm not afraid of Bozzam and Paisley. And daddy will come pretty soon."

When Bozzam and Paisley returned their faces wore worried expressions. Kathleen heard Bozzam curse. Later, about noon, Bozzam rode alone to the gray ridge. When he returned this time, and spoke rapidly to Paisley, Kathleen, watching them from a window, saw Jane, standing near them, jump up and down and clap her hands in glee. Both men muttered at her.

Half an hour afterward Jane entered the cabin again. Her face was aglow with delight.

"I told you daddy would hunt us!" she said. "Bozzam said he just saw a lot of men riding across the desert toward Williams's Cache. Daddy was leading them. Bozzam says the men he saw last night must have been his own men. He was fooled. And now he will have to wait here until daddy and his men come back. And then, like as not, daddy will ride right over that gray ridge on Meteor and kill Bozzam and Paisley!"

But daddy did not come riding across the gray ridge to kill Bozzam and Paisley. The day wore on, and the twilight came; then the dusk, and an early, moonless darkness. In the interval before moonrise Gawne and his vigilantes returned, unsuccessful, having found Williams's Cache deserted except for one man.

The committee discovered, through the outlaw, that Reb Haskell had brought word of the Bozzam City disturbance to Blacky, and that, later, the other men of the Bozzam outfit had drifted in to corroborate

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Haskell's news. Anticipating a visit from the vigilance committee, Blacky had discreetly decamped, leaving behind one of his men, with a message for the leader of the vigilantes.

"Blacky don't want none of your game," was the burden of the message delivered by the lone outlaw to Gawne.

"Hame Bozzam been here?" Gawne questioned.

"Ain't seen him."

"Nigger Paisley? Or a woman?"

The man laughed.

"Paisley ain't been here. It ain't no place for no woman."

Gawne satisfied himself by searching every shanty about the place. After the search he conferred with the committee. There was a grim patience in his voice.

"We've got to take this man's word. Bozzam will bring up here finally. He's given us the slip, and is lying low somewhere. We'll break up. Some of you ride to Fillet's Wells. Billings, you and your men hit the Las Vegas trail—hard! Some more of you scatter for the towns between Fillet's Wells and Las Vegas. I'll go back through Bozzam City, get some more of the Diamond Bar men, and comb the basin and the mountains. If you see Bozzam, don't wait for him to shoot first!"

Gawne had ridden a matter of ninety miles in twenty-four hours. He had partaken of food once. But there were no signs of fatigue about him. When he headed Meteor toward Bozzam City he was conscious of no muscular weariness.

There was no room in his brain for thoughts of his physical condition. A cold, seething, vicious rage against Hame Bozzam dominated him. Approaching the rage in intensity was the bitter self-accusation that had gripped him since he had heard the colonel's story.

Meteor had fared little better than he during the past twenty-four hours. Yet the gray horse's stride, as he swung in a steady lope toward Bozzam City, was not noticeably less sure and springy than it had been for many hours. Meteor could be depended upon for many miles yet.

When Bozzam City's lights flickered in Gawne's vision, the gray horse quickened his pace appreciably. His rider was forced to pull him down that he might conserve his energy and strength.

Gawne stopped at the Palace long enough to make inquiries, to feed Meteor sparingly, and to let him bury his muzzle for one delicious instant in a pail of water. He took nothing himself except a glass of water at the Palace bar.

Hame Bozzam had not been seen in town.

"Some of the gang has pulled their freight," volunteered the barkeeper in the Palace. "The out stage was packed. Gettin' unhealthy here for a lot of 'em—eh? Well, the town can stand it. Blanche Le Claire drifted out—Denver Ed Miller doin' the honors."

Gawne grinned with ghastly mirthlessness. He did not say that he wished Blanche Le Claire had never seen Bozzam City, but that thought was in his mind.

When Meteor had finished his meager meal Gawne mounted again. In an instant they had left the lights of Bozzam City far behind them. When the moon came up Gawne rode more slowly, scanning the trail. When he reached the spot in the basin near the sand ridge—where the colonel had told him Bozzam and Paisley had overtaken him and Kathleen—he studied the hoof-prints in the sand long and intently.

Many times he rode back and forth, and he followed three distinct tracks back toward Bozzam City—to the level above the basin. There the tracks stopped—and were joined by another—those of a lone horseman. The hoof-prints that the lone horse had left led back toward Bozzam City. The others led back into the basin.

The moon made a clear white glare, and Gawne had no difficulty in tracing the hoof-prints; though several times—in sections where the sand was hard and dry—he had to dismount and search for the impressions on foot.

The whole story of the meeting between the colonel and Kathleen and Hame Bozzam and Nigger Paisley was written in the hoof-prints; and as Gawne followed them he accused himself bitterly for not thinking of examining the trail that morning.

There was one puzzling feature. At a

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certain spot in the basin the trails separated—two sets of hoof-prints veering off toward the Harkless ranch, and one continuing on toward the Diamond Bar.

Gawne did not stop to conjecture over this, once it was certain that the party had separated. He gave Meteor the word, and the gray horse whisked him through the basin rapidly toward the Diamond Bar. For it had burst upon Gawne with paralyzing suddenness that if Hame Bozzam were leaving the country his hatred would impel him to attempt some dastardly trick; and Gawne had a presentiment that Bozzam would direct his blow at Jane—for Bozzam had always wanted the girl. And Nigger Paisley was with Bozzam!

Gawne was not surprised when he rode up to the Diamond Bar porch, to see Aunt Emily and Uncle Lafe standing near the open doorway of the ranch-house, in the glare of light from within. Nor was he surprised when Aunt Emily screeched her lamentable news at him:

"Jane's gone, Jeff! Clear gone! Her bed ain't been slept in! An' the lamp was burnin' in the dinin'-room this mornin'—where she'd been readin'! An' Ginger's gone, too! There ain't a hide nor hair of him anywheres around!"

Gawne swung off his horse and grasped the woman by the arms, turning her face to the light from the open doorway.

"Talk fast now—and quit sniveling!" he said coldly. "You say the lamp was burning this morning and her bed hadn't been disturbed. Why didn't you tell me this morning?"

"I hadn't got around—to go to her room," wailed Aunt Emily. "I saw the lamp burnin', but I thought she'd jes' forgot it—goin' to bed without blowin' it out. An' you come an' went away agin so quick!"

"That's all!" said Gawne. He stepped to Uncle Lafe. "Any horses here?"

"The—the boys ain't come in. They're workin' the north fork of the river. The remuda's with 'em."

"All right!" Gawne's voice had a snapping, metallic sound. He was off the porch in a bound; with another he was swinging into the saddle with Meteor already in a dead run. Heading toward the Harkless ranch-house—toward which the two sets of hoof-prints had led from the basin—he leaned over the gray horse's head, whispering, his voice, hoarse with emotion, coming through his teeth:

"I'll have to kill you to-night, Meteor!"

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

THE JESTER

I HAVE covered up with laughter
More than you have drowned in tears;
I have pondered the hereafter;
I have known my griefs and fears.
Underneath my mask and motley
I have heard the noisy years.

I have dreamed my dreams, my masters,
I have thought of life and love,
Counted sorrows and disasters,
Known the sting and pain thereof;
Yet you deem me but a jester
Whom the world shall weary of.

Harlequin I think you call me,
Or perhaps a mad Pierrot;
But when falls the heavy curtain
On the last scene of the show,
What I mean to one who loves me,
Who are you that you should know?

Charles Hanson Towne.

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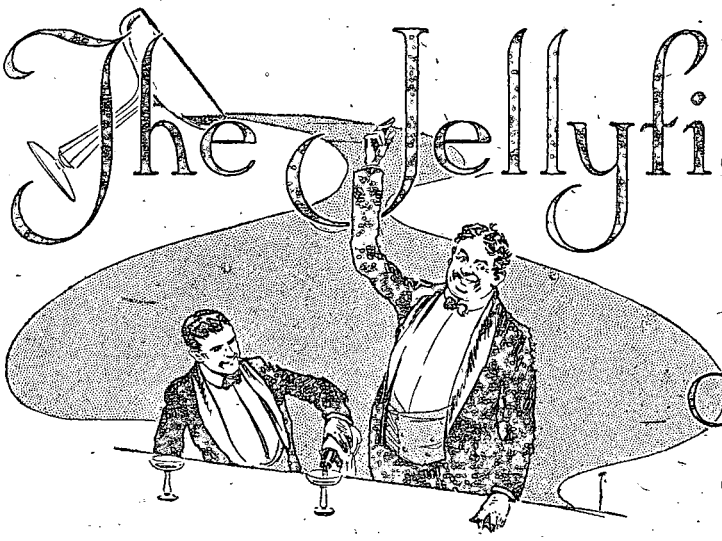
The Jellyfish



by Courtenay Savage

THE morning that Lorton Carter met T. Van Rensellaer Smith (T. standing for Thomas) he mentally dubbed him the jellyfish.

It was cublike and decidedly collegiate that young Carter should confer such a title on one of his father's most trusted clerks. But Carter was young, twenty-five years young, and respect is not overly nourished in most fraternity houses.

As a matter of fact, Carter was right, even if he was impudent. Four years later, when this story has its beginning and ending, he had developed, after the fashion of American young men, to a point where he commanded considerable business knowledge, and was worth the income his father allowed him. His added knowledge had not, however, changed his opinion of T. Van Rensellaer Smith. Now he regarded him with a frank smile and openly called him a jellyfish.

Smith was thirty-eight, and on the books of the Carter Condiment Company (pepper, salt, spices, etc.) he was credited with twenty-one years of service. He was of medium height, possessed a truly pleasant smile, and a frequent blank expression about the eyes which explained why he drew the magnificent sum of twenty-six dollars a week.

It was his bearing rather than his weight that marked Smith from among his fellow clerks, for he was not gross, rather that he carried himself in an ungainly manner. He balanced the scales at two hundred and one —which need not be too fat for a man five feet eight and a half, but in this particular case it was.

T. Van Rensellaer's face was dull, and his neck hung in pink and white ripples over his collar. His loosely-fitting clothes emphasized his broad shoulders and waistline. Add to this the very baggy trousers that always needed pressing — and Carter's floppy illusion concerning the spineless jellyfish was complete.

If his likeness to that limp mass had stopped with the physical, young Carter would have had little cause for uneasiness. He liked Smith—Smith amused him, but Lorton Carter was fast arriving at the point where he needed some greater mental stimulus to back up the advertising ideas which were building up the company's profits.

"What I want, dad," he said one night, "is some one with a young, active mind to back me up. Every time I get a hot idea for some advertising stunt, I spring it on Smith—and it's like dropping white heat into white ice."

Carter senior frowned.

"Smith has been with us for years. He took care of practically all the advertising when it was in my charge."

"I know—you've told me that upward

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of a million times, and I've only got the one answer. Look at what I've done!

"It's all right to be conservative, dad, but one hundred and eighty-six thousand dollars more profit last year is a darn sight more pleasing to me than that slogan of yours about our stuff being superfine and needing no pushing; and, believe me, I'm going to spend a few thousand and just watch the money pour in."

Again Carter senior frowned. He was short and slender, a thick fringe of dark hair keeping him from baldness. Frankly old-fashioned, from the night-shirt he wore at the moment to his business arrangements, he doubted the advisability of any change his son advised.

It was only recently that he had come to believe in his son, largely because his associates told him that the young man was very much worth while.

"And how will the money pour in?" he inquired.

"From subway and street-car signs. Every one rides in a street-car: millionaires, poor people, ordinary every-day folk; and they look at the ads. Now a nice little snappy ad, something about—well—" he stopped.

"Something about what? Please don't do anything too foolish."

"I'll try not to; but then so far I haven't been able to think of just what I *will* do; but it's got to be simple and popular enough to interest people, and yet have snap."

"But if you advertise our products, you advertise me—you advertise yourself. I object to being made a thing of public life. Your grandfather started the condiment business because his ships went to the Indies and brought back the spices which were highly prized by housewives in this country. I have kept up the business just as he did: quietly, and of a high standard. Why should we use what these papers choose to call jingo methods to make our sales. I object, my son; I object."

Young Carter made no further reply. His father was in bed now and under the covers. As a dutiful son, Lorton looked about the room to see that all was well, and started to raise the windows.

"Just one moment," his father interrupted. "I want to say this, that you stand for young America and profits, and if you really feel that Smith is a hindrance, why, I suppose that he can be transferred, though it will break his heart."

"Oh, I guess he'll be just as happy lettering boxes and doing the general bossing in the shipping department."

"He makes splendid letters," the old gentleman admitted soberly. "That was one of the reasons I took him from the shipping department to help me with the advertising."

Lorton laughed.

"And, of course, son, we must give him the same amount of money, even if the other clerks in the shipping department do not get as much."

"Surely; and the first of the year he ought to get a raise. I learned the other day that he has a little princess. She came into the office to meet him. They were going to a church supper."

"A princess?"

"Yes—to him. He's been acting queer for months, and the other night he stumbled all over himself and introduced us in the hall. She's a small school-teacherish person—flat-chested, wears large glasses, and had a piece of old lace pinned on the front of last year's best velvet coat in order to look young. Last night I found him looking up trains to Niagara Falls, and he told me that next spring his lodge was going to hold a convention there.

"It's a wonderful thing to be in love," Carter senior sighed.

"Don't I know it, dad! I've been through the mill more times than you can count."

The older man shook his head.

"Perhaps he would be happier in the shipping department," he said slowly. "Don't hurt him, Lorton; he's a trusted man! Don't hurt him."

"I won't; leave it to me."

And Lorton threw up the window-sash, snapped off the light, and called "good night" as he closed the door.

II.

It was a week before young Carter reached any definite decision as to how and what he could tell T. Van Rensellaer about

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his move to the lower regions of the shipping department. In the meantime he had been casting about in the business waters where dwelt young men of efficiency and had come across a chap a year or two his junior who, he felt sure, was the man he wanted.

He had made no definite proposition; merely discovered the young man's present salary, his past and present work, and guessed as nearly as any one can guess at what the future ought to be.

On Thursday morning—Lorton believed very strongly in the luck of Thursdays—he definitely engaged the young man to start work two weeks from the following Monday, and he started back to his office with the firm intention of firing the jellyfish.

He found Smith engrossed in the newspaper. There was a rather sensational scandal before the public just then, and those that never had indulged, reveled in the printed wrongs of those who had. From the Sunday papers, Smith knew all the café parties by heart. He could have told the decorations at places with names unpronounceable, while the gowns that the ladies in the party wore were marvels of harmonies only because the modiste had testified to their extravagant cost.

"I was just looking at the noon paper," he explained as Carter made his hurried entrance. "That must have been some party they had up there on the roof!"

"Yes." Carter was putting away his overcoat.

"Sure. It says here that he gave each of the girls five hundred dollars to get a new dress. Imagine spending that much money on a dress; more than I get in months. Gee, some of the folk in this town live a life."

Carter, who had been half-hearing Smith's remarks, turned suddenly at the last sentence.

"Haven't you ever been to a midnight party on a theater roof?" he questioned.

Smith was genuinely startled.

"Me? Why, no."

Carter nodded. He dropped to the heavy chair before his desk, summoned a stenographer, and dictated several letters. When he had finished he glanced over at Smith, who was laboriously checking up proofs.

Somehow, he could not summon enough courage to tell him that he was fired from the advertising department.

"Well," he said finally, "have you thought of the great American advertising stunt that is going to drive Carter's condiments into every home?"

Smith pinked visibly, a manner he had when a question on which he might have certain authority was addressed to him.

"No, no, I haven't just thought of one," he said after a moment. "In fact, I'm not very good at thinking up ideas."

"No? Well you ought to sharpen your wits. I've been waiting here all week for you to suggest some trick method of advertising that we could use in the street-cars, and you haven't even dropped a hint of one."

"Yes, sir, I know I haven't. But, then, maybe I'll have an inspiration."

"Yes, maybe. But where do you suppose you'll get that inspiration?" and Lorton grinned knowingly, much to Smith's embarrassment.

For a minute young Carter thought deeply, the smile still lighting his face, and then he jumped to his feet.

"T. Van Rensellaer, you old jellyfish, how would it be if you and I had a party to-night? How would it be if we went out to some bang-up show and then went up to a roof-garden, just like that crowd in the Mattering scandal? Are you game?"

The blood flushed the older man's face.

"I—I don't quite know," he said after a minute. "I'd like to; but, then, you see maybe Miss Connor would object to my going. We've come to an understanding, you know."

"Oh, surely she wouldn't object. Women all like a man who has known life; been in touch with the world."

"Well, I wasn't really going to see her, and if you wouldn't say anything about it to-night, why, I might think it over, sir, and tell you at closing time."

Carter laughed aloud. It was ridiculous to his young blood that this man should think over such a proposition, while the "sir" capped it all. "Sir"—Lorton Carter—"sir!"

The afternoon passed quickly. Young

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Carter was a chap of many thoughts, which were mentally boiled down to some one idea best fitted to the question in hand. Of all his ideas for his new advertising campaign, however, he could find none that suited him.

He was driving his commodity into the homes, and wanted something simple, something that would be easily remembered. For hours he had racked his brain to think of some slogan, something characteristic, but none would come to him, none at least that he felt was worth considering.

When five o'clock arrived, he went to his father's big office at the end of the hall. Years of routine work had made the elder Carter punctual to a terrifying degree, and Lorton knew that promptly at five he departed, not to return till on the following morning. He also knew that if he were going home with his father, or by any chance not going home for dinner, he must report.

To-night he announced that he would work for another hour and have his dinner down-town. He did not mention his proposed revel with the jellyfish—he knew that his father would be suspicious of any such move. Instead, he ushered Carter senior to the car and returned to his desk.

At six o'clock he missed Smith and went in search of him. He found him in the washroom laboring over a new collar and tie—the tie was a beautiful shade of purple, with plenty of Persian effect; and his face shone from the effects of a fresh shave.

"So you're going with me?" he demanded.

"Yes; that is, if you still want me, Mr. Lorton."

"Bet your life I want you; and to do this thing right, I sent for a taxi to drive us up-town. Where would you like to go to dinner? Any special place?"

T. Van Rensellaer grunted. He knew the names of most of the city restaurants by heart, but at the moment he could think of nothing more elegant than the Hartford Lunch.

III.

It was just quarter to twelve when Carter piloted the awe-eyed Smith to a front and much-gilded table at the Folies de Nuit. They had been to dinner and Smith had vigorously applauded his way through a musical show. The Folies de Nuit, however, was the grand climax of the evening. To the sophisticated, the Folies was just one more place to go before it was time to go home, but to the jellyfish it was something more glorious than his mental pictures of the Temple of Solomon and the Palace of Nero. He felt a decidedly elating sense of guilt as he settled himself gingerly on the spindle-legged chair and looked about him.

At the far end of the room, a golden curtain hid the stage, while in the balcony, just above, a place that seemed a hanging bower of twisting vines, the musicians were already playing. For many minutes he was lost in wonder.

Finally, half-reluctantly, he turned to Carter:

"Some life," he admitted, "and I never thought I'd be sitting at the table next to a woman with a dress cut low like that one."

"It is rather low, isn't it?" Lorton surveyed the vision in question. "But then it's beautiful and fashionable."

"You said it," the jellyfish unconsciously slipped into the phraseology of the office boys.

Again T. Van Rensellaer turned to survey the crowd, and it was during that minute that the gang arrived.

The gang was Carter's idea. He had decided at dinner that the jellyfish was too good a sport not to share him with his friends, so he carefully rounded up four girls and a couple of fellows, bound that the jellyfish should have the night of his life.

The gang had rather a quieting effect on Smith. The girls were women of a type he had never talked with before; the men in their snappily cut business suits made him conscious that they must earn more than he did. Lorton, seeing the embarrassment of his guest of honor, ordered champagne, and as the gold curtains were divided for the opening number, he persuaded Smith that champagne was really as harmless as cider.

Smith finished the glass at once. He would have finished anything so great was

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his surprise as the glittering ladies in decidedly abbreviated costumes advanced from the small stage, one of them making right toward the table where he sat.

From that minute on the party was a great success. After the third bottle had departed and another had been called, the transformation of the jellyfish was complete.

He leaned across to the girl next to him and assured her that she was darn lucky to be invited to his party. He expressed in his very best "addressing-the-meeting" terms the fact that his friend Lorton was a large hunk of all right; and it was only with some difficulty that he was persuaded not to attempt to dance one number with a chorus girl who offered the invitation.

Had he been strictly sober he could easily have demanded money from the management for the entertainment he was giving the diners about him. Three tables away they listened intently to hear his remarks, which gradually became more and more audible.

In plain, ordinary, every-day conversation, the jellyfish was drunk, and giving the best number of the evening.

However, it must be said for Lorton Carter that he took no advantage of his father's employee. When T. Van Rensellaer had reached a certain stage he ordered all drinks shut off, and suggested that they have coffee. The rest of the party, having laughed till laughter was stale—it can only become stale, you know—were quite willing to call a halt.

The jellyfish, however, felt differently. From the lining of his vest where it was pinned, he drew forth a modest wad of money, and offered to buy drinks.

The offer was declined.

"Aw, come on; this is a sporty sort of a party, nobody drinking!"

Again they declined.

"I don't think we'd better have any more," Carter assured the star guest. "Just put your money back in your pocket. You may need it for a rainy day."

The jellyfish eyed him with a wide stare.

"What do you care 'bout 'rainy days'?" he said thickly. "The Carter Condiment Company—that's us," he explained to those at the table. "The Carter Condiment Company's goin' to make a million dollars next year. You ought to see the signs we got for the subway—smart, catchy things with rimes all over them. I'm writing most of them myself:

"Pepper, salt, and mustard,
They can't be used for custard;
But when you want them, you want them bad,
And you get the best from us."

He stopped the chant; but before those about him could interrupt he started again:

"Nutmegs ripen on a South Sea isle;
Cloves grow in the selfsame place;
Carter ships them to your girl's home,
And they spice your wedding cake."

"Give him a drink," one of the men suggested before the jellyfish could recite further, and he summoned a waiter.

"Don't you think they're nice verses? Just imagine them with natty pictures on the cards. Then maybe we could get the old man to put up a little cash in prizes and get some amateur verses. My fiancée writes very fair verse. She might compete with me. What yer say, Lorton?"

Lorton was not saying a word. Just at that minute he was out of the party, so T. Van Rensellaer gave a long recitation on the glories of his future wife's mentality. The drinks went round once more, and a black-face comedian attracted T. Van Rensellaer's attention. When the act was finished he had been quiet for so long a time that the effects of the evening began to show, and he nodded sleepily.

Those at the table laughed regretfully.

"Guess I've got to get him home," Carter decided, and he led the sleepy and gloriously intoxicated jellyfish in the direction of an elevator and a taxicab.

IV.

It was nine when Lorton Carter reached the office the following morning, and he was worried—not for himself, but because he had had such a difficult time getting the jellyfish home and to bed. Personally, he was in the pink of condition. A cold bath, a brisk walk, and just the right kind of a breakfast can set a man up good as new.

T. Van Rensellaer had not arrived. Car-

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ter pushed aside the morning's mail, which was generally sorted and opened for him, and pulled forward a large pad of paper. For several minutes he sketched rapidly, a smile playing about his lips. Then, after two telephone calls, he talked with his father on the office telephone for several minutes; a conversation which greatly pleased Carter senior.

It was just ten twenty-five when the jellyfish made a hurried and unsteady entrance, and half-collapsed on his chair. Carter looked at him, but said nothing. The jellyfish breathed audibly, and sat up.

"I'm afraid," his English was faultlessly correct, and a studied effort, "I'm afraid that I was not exactly myself last night."

"You were drunk," Carter corrected him cheerfully.

"Yes, and I apologize. I do more than apologize, I resign."

"You what?"

"I resign, before you can possibly discharge me. I am very much afraid that I humiliated you before your friends. I think I even called you by your first name, and I have a recollection that I advanced an idea that had filled me for days, an idea that I have cherished but which is so foolish that I have never disclosed it."

"You mean—'Nutmegs ripen on a South Sea isle?'"

The jellyfish reddened and looked foolishly at his finger-tips.

"I apologize," he said mechanically.

Carter laughed.

"T. Van Rensellaer, you darned jellyfish you, you're still soused!"

"Yes, sir."

"And I guess I had better not tell you what I had planned."

"I can still hear," Smith corrected, "but remember, I resign."

"Yes, and I didn't accept your resignation. As I have mentioned on several occasions, you were seeing red last night, but you had an idea. It was just a simple, foolish idea that wasn't new, but one that was so good that I'm going to use it."

"Use it!" exclaimed T. Van Rensellaer in bewilderment. "Use that about the nutmeg?"

"The idea, T. Van Rensellaer, not the verse. I watched two or three faces when you were pouring forth that very bad verse and the idea got across. I'm not firing you, jellyfish; I'm going to keep you here with me as an inspiration, and the governor says he'll give you thirty a week, and later he'll give you forty to pay for the idea."

The jellyfish gasped and turned very red.

"Yep, you're first assistant in the new advertising department. A young fellow I just hired is second assistant. Have another idea and I'll give you the official title of third, fourth and fifth assistant."

The jellyfish nodded. He remembered very keenly, helped by the pain in his head, that he had been irresponsible the previous night. Now he believed that the least said was easiest explained, so he said nothing.

Carter, never having seen a man so influenced by joy, and believing it a brand all his own, went on with his writing. Ten minutes later he looked up.

The jellyfish was huddled in a state very near collapse, his huge arms hanging over the side of the chair, his hat had fallen to the ground, his nodding head emphasizing the rolls of flesh that overhung the collar.

"Some jellyfish," Carter remarked inaudibly, and went on with his work.

BENEATH A WINDOW

DEAR heart, beneath your window
I picture in my mind a bed of flowers,
Rare, tiny, fragrant violets,
Lifting fair faces to the sun and showers.

For did you not confide that once
You leaned without and wept through loneliness?
So now I think there must be sprung
A bloom where fell each tear which you confess.

Livingston Ludlow Biddle.

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Where's the Woman

by Fred Jackson

Author of "A Full House," "The Diamond Necklace," etc.

CHAPTER XVII.

THEY STRIKE THE TRAIL.

ANN had barely time to bathe and change before dinner, so that she did not see Ted until she descended to the dining-room. And then her mother and father were present and to talk about Lorraine Satterlea was impossible.

But after dinner, she intercepted him as he was starting out, and drawing him into the library, she told him of the day's discoveries. And when he found out that she knew where he had been the night that Kaine died and why he did not want to tell, he confessed everything.

He said that he was the man that Henley had seen on the steps. He had gone as far as Cora's door before he noticed that the house was in darkness. But when he saw that the butler was not in the hall and that only the dim night-light on the stairs was burning, he had gone away at once.

Knowing that Lorraine was trying to inveigle Bobby Aiken into investing money in a show for her, he had promised to steer clear of her apartment as she thought it wiser not to let Bobby know that they were married. However, vague misgivings had been troubling him, concerning Lorraine.

He had heard rumors about her past that surprised and shocked him. And being of an extremely jealous disposition, he had yielded to the impulse to go unannounced to her apartment and slip into one of the rear rooms until Bobby had gone.

He was not challenged by the hall boy, who knew him. He opened and closed the front door without attracting the attention of the two persons in Lorraine's little drawing-room But he heard her voice in its most caressing cadences addressing Bobby—he heard Bobby's voice responding —and with catlike tread and throbbing temples, he crept nearer.

He reached the door of the drawing-room. He saw his wife of two months in Bobby's arms with her arms around Bobby's neck. And in a burst of passionate rage and resentment, he drew out the gun that was in his back pocket and fired.

His intention was to kill his wife, but she saw him even as he pulled the trigger, and threw herself in a panic of fear, behind Aiken. So the bullet found him.

The rest of the story Ann knew. Aiken was horrified to learn that the girl with whom he had been carelessly amusing himself was Ted's wife. Cochrane had been sent for to hush the threatening scandal. Ted had been prevented from choking his wife—only by the sight of the havoc he had already wrought.

But he had gone from her without a word, despite her explanations and excuses and he had not communicated with her since. Already, he repented his infatuation and his hasty secret marriage. And he

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agreed with Ann that it must be at once annulled or he must be secretly divorced.

Ted did not go out that night. Ann phoned for the family lawyer and they told the whole story to him, and he promised to call upon Mrs. Theodore Stonington, Jr., the very next morning and settle with her financially, so that she would relinquish her right to the name and to the gentleman who had conferred it upon her.

And by the time all this was settled, Raines phoned to say that he had examined all of the servants and that he had eliminated them from his list. Ann thanked him for the violets, and they arranged to meet the next morning at ten.

Raines was waiting the next day, when Ann appeared, and he greeted her eagerly with:

"I've been walking up and down the block in front of this house for half an hour waiting for it to be ten o'clock!"

"Really?" cried Ann wonderingly. "Why?"

"Because I've thought of a stratagem that may simplify our investigations tremendously. Listen!"

He pulled up a big chair for her, took one very close and continued:

"This is the idea: You write a note to Cora—or simply fold up some stationery—some of your own private, personal stationery and put it into an envelope. Then you seal the envelope, leaving the front of it blank. Then we drive around to all the places mentioned in the reports on Cora's movements.

"I wait in the cab. You enter alone—the milliner's, the dressmaker's, the manicurist's, the shoe-shop—every one—and asking for the attendant that served your sister—or for the proprietor, you proffer the envelope and say in a whisper: 'For Mrs. Kaine! She told me you would forward it! Do so, at once, please! It is very important.' Do you see the point? As you say this, you must watch for a start—a tell-tale expression."

Ann looked grave—meditative.

"You think I may surprise her unknown friend into self-betrayal?"

"Yes. I hope so."

"It sounds a splendid plan," agreed Ann, her eyes beginning to sparkle, "and well worth trying. I'll fix the paper in the envelope and get my hat, while you are hailing a cab."

"I have one waiting," he answered.

"Then I'll hurry."

She was gone only a few moments. Then she appeared carrying the decoy letter and they started off.

Ann had shopped with her sister often enough to know who served her in each place on the list, so she had no bothersome delays to endure on this score. But her progress was disheartening.

At the milliner's, first, then at the private shoemaker's, at the corsetière's, and at the lingerie shop, the request she whispered was heard through in wide-eyed amazement.

She was regarded with wonder and anxiety. And the puzzled, troubled attendants protested vehemently that they knew nothing whatever about Mrs. Kaine or her whereabouts.

At the fifth place, however, which was Mme. Polli's fashionable dressmaking establishment, it was Mme. Polli herself to whom Ann went, and that good-natured stout person asked Ann to repeat the words that Raines had told her to say.

When Ann had done this, Mme. Polli slowly took the note and said:

"Very well. If Mme. Kaine told you I would forward it, I think I can guess where it is she desires that it shall be sent! You may trust me, *mademoiselle.*"

Ann's heart leaped.

"Then you do know what has become of her! You do?" she cried.

"I do not know, *mademoiselle,* but I try to guess," said the woman. "I have no instructions regarding the forwarding of a note, but—I have read of the disappearance of Mme. Kaine and—I—what you say in America—I add four from two and two, *n'est ce pas?*"

"From what two and two? What do you know about Cora?" asked Ann.

Mme. Polli looked troubled.

"You ask of me what I know, and yet you bring to me this note? How can this be, *mademoiselle?* If you were not the sister of Mme. Kaine, I should doubt—?"

"But I am her sister," cried Ann, "and

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I have only her interest at heart. I desire only her best welfare and her happiness. It is most important that I reach her as soon as possible and induce her to come home. It is her only chance to escape the stigma of suspicion being cast upon her. She must come back and fight! To remain hidden away is foolish! If you knew how we have suffered—how my parents are suffering even now, you would not hesitate to aid us—and her, too!"

"You desire that I tell you this address to which I suspect she has gone? Is that it?"

"Yes. That and — whatever else you know about her."

"She will not blame me? She will not hold me responsible and take her patronage away?"

"No, I promise you that."

"Well," said Mme. Polli. "She is free now. Her husband is dead. And what I tell is really no harm. I will."

"Wait then," said Ann, "until I call in my friend—and my sister's friend—and the representative of my family."

Mme. Polli nodded. Ann went to the door and summoned Raines. And when introductions had been made and all three were seated in *madame's* private office, she began:

"You remember an evening wrap, *mademoiselle,* that I have made for Mme. Kaine—a wrap of gold with black skunk fur?"

"Yes," said Ann, "I remember. Well?"

"While I have this wrap in work, there comes into my shop one day a young man named Westley Scollard. You do not know this name?"

"No," said Ann, puzzled.

"No, nor I. He is not of your class in society. He is from the West. He knows no one in New York. Well—he explain to me that it is his desire to purchase for his sister an evening wrap. It is to be a birthday gift. And it must be something—chic—something out of the *ordinaire*—something unique! I show him models. He is not pleased. As he have explain the price is no object, I am mos' anxious to please him.

"By mistake in comes one of the helpers with Mme. Kaine's wrap while I rack my poor head for please this M. Scollard. In a moment he is taken with the wrap. He desire to purchase that. I explain it is made especially for Mme. Kaine. He will have one like it—the duplicate. But it is agreed between Mme. Kaine and me that I never duplicate her clothes—never!

"I explain to this Scollard. He plead. In the end, I say I will ask Mme. Kaine's permission to make the duplicate, only silver instead of gold. He desire I should telephone. I explain that Mme. Kaine presently arrive for the fitting. To make a long story short, she come, I present M. Scollard to plead for himself. Mme. Kaine is gracious. M. Scollard is infatuated. From that moment, he haunt my shop for another glimpse of my best customer."

"I begin to see," cried Raines abruptly.

"Exactly," nodded the Frenchwoman. "He comes daily, for this or that. She come—very often. They meet. They become friends. They sit and chat in my little office, here. I am in and out—the chaperon. Sometimes there is tea. And so it goes.

"*Madame* grows more beautiful. She falls in love with this mad, impetuous, handsome man. He is beside himself with love of her. He want her to get the divorce and marry him. She hesitates. And so do things stand, when I read in the paper that M. Kaine is dead and Mme. Kaine has disappear! That is all.

"As I say, I make the sum of two and two without to be told anything. I have my idea where Mme. Kaine have gone, and when *mademoiselle* require that I send to her the letter, it is in my mind to send it in haste to the address of M. Scollard. For I have noticed that he has not been here since the day of the evening that Mme. Kaine disappear!"

"Where does this Scollard live?" asked Raines eagerly.

"One moment," answered Mme. Polli.

She consulted a huge ledger beside her and announced:

"2218 Sandford Avenue, Flushing, Long Island. There reside both M. Scollard and his sister Mme. Madison."

"2218 Sandford," repeated Raines,

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writing it down. Then he rose. "We'll go there at once," he said. "I'll get a car to make the run. It isn't far."

"I can't tell you what a service you have rendered us!" added Ann, taking both the Frenchwoman's hands. "I shall never, never be able to thank you enough! I shall never be able to repay you."

"It is nothing. It is forgotten!" said Mme. Polli, kissing her. "My love and my sympathy and my good wishes to your sister!"

Ann and Raines phoned for a public touring-car and when it was hurried around, climbed into the back seat and wrapped themselves in rugs and gave the chauffeur the address that Mme. Polli had just given them. He started the car with a grinding of brakes and a jarring of shifting gears, and a moment later, they were headed for the Queensboro Bridge and Long Island.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHAT CORA DID.

TWO thousand, two hundred and eighteen Sandford Avenue proved to be an old fashioned mansion of stately aspect, standing in the midst of a broad lawn. Descending at the side door, under the *porte cochère* Ann and Raines mounted the steps and rang the polished bell.

A maid in black and white uniform answered their summons.

"Miss Ann Stonington to see Mrs. Madison and Mr. Scollard," said Raines.

"Come in, please," said the maid, and ushered them into the little yellow reception-room to the left of the hall.

They waited a moment, studying their surroundings. It was a Louis XVI room, very dainty and charming. The scent of French roses permeated the air—not too strongly. The morning sunlight, streaming through silken curtains, filled the place with a particularly bright and cheerful glow.

On the hearth-rug, which was of very thick, black fur, a white Persian kitten was curled up comfortably. Ann sank down upon a settee, and murmured gratefully:

"What pleasant surroundings! Pleasant people live here, I know!"

"The house has an air!" admitted Raines.

"So homey and peaceful and well-ordered," she murmured. "It rests me just to come in here and sit down."

He smiled at her, his eye lingering upon her bright dark eyes and parted lips, upon the wisps of curling hair blown out of place by the wind to curl against her cheek and the nape of her neck, upon her white skin, gleaming—rose-tinted from the cold.

He mentally compared her with Cora and wondered how he had ever thought Cora more beautiful. And he was just wishing that Cora was here so that he could see them together again and compare them, when the portières of brocaded satin parted, and Cora came in.

"Ann!" she cried, coming forward with outstretched hands and eyes swimming in tears. "Oh, Ann! Ann!"

And:

"Cora!" cried Ann.

They were in each other's arms by this time, holding each other close, kissing as though they had not met in years. And indeed, so it seemed to them both, so much had happened in the few days that stretched between Virginia Clarke's bridge party and this moment.

Raines, standing off, felt his heart leap as his eyes rested on this girl who had once meant everything to him. But not because she stirred old memories. Because the sight of her proved conclusively that when he had fancied himself in love with her, he had been mistaken—that when he had believed her so much lovelier than Ann, he had been grotesquely short-sighted.

And it was not that she had faded, either, or that she had lost anything of her dazzling charm through her recent trouble. She was, if possible, more brilliant than before.

Her childish face had something wistful about it, now—an appealing expression as though she would implore the world to be kind to her. Her perfect little Cupid's-bow mouth looked tremulous like the mouth of a child that is being punished or scolded.

Her skin was fresh and smooth and amazingly white, as always. And she was perfectly coiffed and gowned. Cora would

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have managed that on a desert island—somehow!

She had on a morning gown of turquoise-blue stuff, trimmed with some soft white fur and heavy gold embroidery; a belted coat effect of chiffon came over the skirt, to her knees. She looked more like a bride than a widow — except for that pleading, piteous look on her face that begged that she might be treated kindly.

As she released Ann, she saw Arthur Raines over her sister's shoulder and gave him her hand—and then she turned and called behind her toward the doorway:

"Westley! Eleanor!"

Mrs. Madison proved a very tall woman whose white hair belied her youthful face. She was handsome in a dignified, rather stately fashion, and she resembled her brother strikingly, although he was taller and more rugged.

At first glance, both Ann and Raines understood how this man had attracted Cora, for he advanced to meet Ann with almost Southern courtesy and said:

"I have heard so much about you, I am happy to meet you and know you at last!" and he gave Raines a handshake that even Raines was conscious of.

He was the direct antithesis of James Kaine. Where Kaine had been brutal, gruff, even rude, this man was kindly, fine-mannered, and always considerate. He had been bred to feel a protective gentle consideration for all of the opposite sex and he revealed this in his bearing toward them; and Cora, unused to attentions from Kaine and longing for them as she had longed for them all her pampered life, had surrendered before this man's ardent wooing.

When Mrs. Madison had been presented and when they all found chairs, it was Raines who broke the short, uncomfortable pause that fell upon them:

"I suppose," he said, "you wonder how we found you. We on our part, wonder why you tried to disappear and to keep your family in ignorance of your whereabouts and your safety. Suppose I tell you what you want to know first. Then you can supply the rest. What do you say?"

"Fine!" cried Scollard nodding. "Fire away!"

"Well, then, we tricked Mme. Polli into telling us about your meetings in the shop and your interest in each other. We did it by pretending that you had told us you could be reached through her!"

"But how did you come to suspect her?" asked Cora.

"We didn't. We tried all the other tradespeople without success and reached her only by means of elimination."

"But what made you suspect the tradespeople?" asked Scollard.

"We saw from the reports that Kaine got, that their shops were the only places you visited often and unchaperoned."

"I see," said Cora nodding. "I did not suppose you would—any one would guess the truth. Jim—never did. Although I had to order heaps more clothes than I needed—just for an excuse to go to Mme. Polli's—and to keep her in a good humor, too."

"That was Arthur Raines's cleverness," said Ann smiling. "If I hadn't thought of sending for him at once, Heaven knows how long we should have been in finding you. But tell me for pity's sake why did you want to keep us in ignorance of your whereabouts. You must have known we wouldn't betray you! Why couldn't you have let us know at least that you were safe?"

Cora's blue eyes filled with tears.

"I meant to," she said, "but I was too ill to leave my bed the day after I came here, and I thought if Westley or Eleanor phoned, you'd all be suspicious and wonder why I didn't phone myself. And you wouldn't have believed that I was just ill from the excitement and worry and fright and—everything. I thought it much better to wait until I could talk to some one of you on the phone myself!"

"Well?" said Ann patiently, as Cora paused.

"Then the papers came out—and—we learned what he had done."

Cora's eyes were dry enough now. They widened with terror.

"You mean—he died after you left the house? You didn't know about it until you read it in the papers?"

"Of course not. How could I? When we left the Clarke's we went straight home.

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I made up my mind in a moment—the moment he struck me—that I would go away with Westley. He had been urging me for some time, but I was afraid to take the step. I was afraid of what people would say—and that every one would cut me and turn against me. And I hesitated, although I cared much more for him than I had ever cared for any one in my life—"

She paused there to glance across at him. He rose and drew nearer, coming to stand beside her chair with his hand on hers.

"But when Jim struck me," continued Cora, "that was the end. I made up my mind to leave his house that night. But I wanted to go secretly for he had often said he would fix me—if I tried to leave him—so that no other man would ever want me. I think he would have, too, he was so jealous. He would have disfigured me, in some way. So I waited. He had been drinking heavily. I knew he must fall asleep after it and sleep heavily.

"When we got back to the house, I went to my room, but he followed me. I could not prevent that, you know, because he had had the door between our rooms made without a lock or bolt. He dismissed my maid and began to devil me. He usually did that when he was drunk. Liquor seemed to arouse in him an unnatural desire to tantalize me and event to hurt me. Often he hugged me or pinched me until I screamed with pain.

"That night, he began by sneering at my —what he called my money-lust. He said I cared for nothing on earth but money and what it would buy. He said I had sold myself to him for his money. And he hinted that much as I loathed him I would stick to him for all eternity rather than relinquish the things he could give me.

"He was drinking all the time. He always drank before he went to bed. He said he couldn't sleep without it. And as he went on—on, he kept getting drunker and drunker. Then he reached the next stage of his usual course.

"He wanted to pet me—not really you understand! He would pretend to pet me and would hurt me, and laugh until he lost his breath when I cried out. That night, I eluded him. It was not very difficult he was so unsteady. And then—oh—after a long time, a change came over him.

"I thought he was going to have an attack like he had once before in the country. The other time, he got quite wild and raced about and yelled and acted as if something awful were after him. I ran out of the room to-night. Then I heard him fall—and everything was quiet — and I came back. He writhed a little and then lay still. I thought he had simply fallen into a drunken stupor. But I suppose that was when he died!"

"When did he break his champagne glass?" asked Raines.

"When he began to chase me about the room."

"He drank out of your glass, then, didn't he?"

"Yes. I used to keep a glass in my bath —an ordinary water goblet. He went and got that and used it."

"He went to your bath-room himself for it?"

"Yes."

"Did you have any cyanid of potassium in your bath-room?"

"No, of course not!"

"When he fell, then, you had no idea he was dead. You did not even go and see?"

"No. He was lying as if he were simply asleep. I waited in his room to make sure that he was not just playing possum, then I crept back into the room, got my jewels and my cloak, and crept away. Oh, as I opened the safe I came across a letter from Dick Cochrane, asking me to go away with him. I thought if I left that there it would mislead Jim; and while he was trying to find me through Dick, I should be making my escape safely with Westley. So I left the letter as a blind for Jim.

"I then slipped out, going through his room, because my door had been locked on the outside by my maid. I had a phone in my room, but it connected with a switchboard down-stairs, and so I never could use it except when a servant was on duty in the hall. Jim had this arrangement so that I could not send or receive messages without being overheard.

"However, when I reached the lower hall, there was no one there, and nothing

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to prevent my using the phone in safety. I got Westley and asked him to come for me. Then I waited there in the hall for three-quarters of an hour."

"Did you see Ted come to the door?" asked Ann.

"Ted? No!"

"He must have come while you were upstairs, then, with your husband."

"What did he come for?"

"To see that you were all right. I had told him what happened at the Clarkes'. But he found the house dark, and did not want to ring for fear of starting things up again."

"That must have been before I came down. No one came to the door while I waited in the hall until Westley came in his car."

"Did you fasten the night-lock again with your key from outside?" asked Raines.

"Yes. I wanted Jim to think at first that I was hiding somewhere in the house. I thought the longer he was delayed in pursuing me, the more chance we had of getting away."

"I think that is all," said Scollard, taking up the story from there. "We came at once to my sister's place here. Cora meant to get in touch with her own family the next morning and explain, but she was ill, and then the papers came out and they made it look is if Cora had killed her husband.

"She was afraid to make her whereabouts known, then, even to her own family, for fear that her father or some one would try to sneak out here on the quiet to see her and would betray the secret unwittingly to the police. A common way of tracking criminals, you know, is to watch their family or friends and wait for them to communicate. And Cora was terrified that they would arrest her. She thought it would be much more sensible to remain hidden safely until the detectives and police could find the real truth of the matter."

"Of course," said Cora, "I think he killed himself. He must have, for there was no one in my bath-room to put poison in his glass, and there was no poison in my bath-room to put in his glass. He must have had it in his pocket, though why he wanted to take his own life is a mystery to me. He seemed to be in the best of spirits when he was pursuing me about the room. He was shouting with laughter!"

"You see," interposed Mrs. Madison, "Cora knows that she is innocent, and we who know her, realize that she is—that it would be impossible for her to do such a heinous thing as this. But the facts do seem to be against her, and we thought that if she went back and told the truth, nobody'd believe her, and she would probably be held. It seemed wiser just to lie low here and wait. Sooner or later they must find out who purchased the poison. If they find out that it was Kaine himself who did, why, that would clear Cora, you see."

Ann looked dubiously at Raines. He shook his head.

"I think you are making a mistake," he said. "A person who faces the music and fights always has more sympathy from the onlookers than a person who runs away. If you go back, now, and give out the fact that you did not elope with Cochrane; that you simply sought refuge with your friend, Mrs. Madison—if you bring Mrs. Madison with you and, perhaps, a maid, to bear witness that you were here; and if we prove that Cochrane was elsewhere nursing a pal who is ill—why, things begin to look better for you already.

"You will say that you are not in love with Cochrane; that you left the letter merely as a blind to mislead your husband and prevent him from pursuing you. That fact alone indicates your innocence. Don't you see? You'll tell the truth, with the exception of your interest in Mr. Scollard, and soon you'll be the heroine of this affair instead of the villainess. If you give yourself up before you are discovered and dragged back, it will make you seem innocent!"

"Exactly!" interjected Scollard at this point. "I agree with Mr. Raines entirely, my dear!"

"But will they put me in jail?" asked Cora, in abject fear.

"No. Not on the evidence they have against you now," said Raines. "I promise you that."

Then he turned to Ann and asked:

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"What time is the funeral? It's to-day, isn't it?"

"Yes, at half past two, I think."

"You must attend the funeral," said Raines. "That will give you a natural reason for coming back, and your presence will be a point in your favor."

"I couldn't. I hate funerals. I've never been able to go to one."

"You must go to this one," insisted Raines. "It is vitally necessary. Have you black to wear?"

"I have nothing here," said Cora. "I have been wearing Eleanor's clothes."

"Well, they fit you perfectly," put in Mrs. Madison, "and I have black enough for both of us. Come! If we must go, we haven't much time to waste!"

Cora looked up at Scollard appealingly.

"Must I go?" she asked.

"I'm afraid so. I think you must do everything Mr. Raines tells you. He has your interest at heart, and he knows best about these things. Remember, your liberty is at stake—maybe your life. It is for our happiness you are fighting!"

"Ye-es," said Cora, rising.

She left the room with Mrs. Madison and Ann, and while the two ladies dressed, Raines and Scollard smoked and got acquainted, and outlined their plan of campaign. Then there was a bit of luncheon served to all five, and they started in the closed limousine for town.

They stopped at the Stonington house while Ann donned dark clothes and turned Scollard over to Ted. It was agreed that he must steer clear of Cora for the present, for the sake of public opinion.

So only Mrs. Madison, Raines, Ann, and Cora went on to the services at the Kaine house. They arrived just a few minutes before the Rev. Mr. Nelson began to speak, and their appearance created a sensation.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CONFESSION.

STEPHEN KAINE had expected to be the only mourner representing the family of the deceased, for his one sister was unable to come on from the West, and Cora was gone. Accordingly, he had given the old family servants permission to stand behind him during the services.

He thought, in that way, partially to hide from the world at large his brother's pitiful unpopularity. For the world at large was there to see.

Society folk, political lights, the curious, the morbid, sensation seekers, newspaper people—all gathered together in the flower-laden rooms to pay last "respects" to the body of Jim Kaine. And knowing that they would come, Stephen had arranged the effective group of family retainers in the background. But the appearance of the beautiful widow made Stephen's stagecraft unnecessary.

As she came slowly into the room on her father's arm, a startling picture in her heavy mourning, there was an instant of absolute silence—then a wave of whispering and rustling as heads turned and necks craned to follow her progress.

Stephen kissed her hand as he went forward to welcome her. And he gave her the place that he had chosen for himself, nearest the flower-decked casket.

The Rev. Mr. Nelson took his position with throbbing heart. It was the first time in his career that he had ever been called upon to officiate at the services for a suicide or a victim of murder, and he was still somewhat uncertain as to what he should say.

He had prepared a discourse based upon the life (as he knew it) and the good deeds of the deceased—a discourse that ignored the manner of the man's passing. But he was a young divine, and he was newly called from the West to the pulpit that he occupied, and he wondered if a dramatic tirade against those who take human life might not be timely, appropriate, and effective.

He reminded himself that one must get into the papers occasionally, in order to hold these wealthy churches nowadays, and though he had been in New York for two months, his sermons had not yet been quoted.

He knew that the Kaine funeral would be written up at length, especially now that Cora had returned so dramatically to be

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present at the services. He knew that he would be mentioned.

But was a mere mention all that he could manage? Might he not capture the headlines by pointing a dreadful moral and preaching from the text "Thou shalt not kill!"

He was sincere in his desire to lead men to God, but he knew the difficulty of leading them in this day and generation when they seem to grow daily less interested in their spiritual welfare. By achieving a splendid notoriety, might he not attract the attention of thousands that he could not possibly reach in the ordinary course of things?

Might he not catch them through the pages of the papers and so draw them to his fold?

He thought it worth trying.

A hush fell over every one as the Rev. Mr. Nelson took his place beside the casket, partly facing the widow and brother of the deceased, partly facing the crowd that filled the rest of the two huge drawing-rooms.

He was very young and very, very serious, and his voice, as he began, rang through the room with marvelous sweetness. But from the very start his words were tinged with bitterness.

He began by telling of James Kaine's life, his deeds, and his accomplishments. He spoke of his youth, spent in poverty and want. He spoke of his struggle for an education; of his energy and hopefulness and persistency. He traced his course through night school, his early business ventures, his entrance into politics.

He told what Kaine had done for his State and his city. He told the story of the corner down-town where Kaine bestowed free overcoats on thousands every year just because once as a boy, he had stood shivering there and looking enviously in at a coat in a store window—a coat that he needed badly and could not buy.

He told of the thousands of hungry that Kaine fed every year; of the thousands of needy that he helped.

"And this is the man," cried the Rev. Mr. Nelson, "who lies dead before you today—his life among us ended, his power to aid the hungry and the needy gone from him forever. If God in his wisdom had called him, we could but bow our heads and say, 'God's will be done'; but it was not God who called. He was cut down ruthlessly in the prime of his manhood, and in defiance of God—for God Himself has said in the commandments, 'Thou shalt not kill!' and this mandate was ignored! Whether he took his own life, or whether he was robbed of it by another, murder was done and sin was committed! That was taken away which no mortal hand can give back again. For though they can do much that is great and wonderful, scientists cannot give life!

"Too many of us forget that each of us forms a necessary link in a great chain, and that when we take life we interfere with the running of the whole universe. Who, now, will feed the hungry that this man fed? Who will clothe the thousands to whom he yearly gave raiment?

"If murder was done, will this man's murderer or murderess take upon himself or herself the burdens that he has let fall? Not only one man has been struck down! Thousands have been affected. Thousands will be homeless, thousands will die of cold and hunger, privation and want, because this man was deprived of his life before his time!

"Ye who are weak and would go unsummoned out into the beyond, hear me now, and ask yourselves who will your going hurt or harm? Who will be affected by your death? Will ye be the only ones who will suffer?

"Ye who would take life because you have been injured or affronted or wronged, think well before you strike! Will your victim be the only one who will suffer? I say unto you, when God said 'Thou shalt not kill!' He said it not only to keep the hands of a murderer bloodless, but to keep the balance of his universe assured!

"So beware, for what ye do, in ignorance or knowingly, shall be on your own head! And by what ye do, ye shall be judged! I say unto you, live by the law of God, as given unto you by his prophets and his Son, and seek not to find the reason behind it, for God sees reasons that the mind of

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man may not see, and I implore you to make your peace with Him!"

The minister had been working himself up as he developed this plea to mankind, and his voice rang out as he delivered the final sentences. Then there came an instant's hush, as he paused to begin the last prayers for the soul of James Kaine, and in the hush, as the awed crowd stood with downcast eyes and baited breath, a woman's voice suddenly sounded.

"God have mercy on me! God have mercy on me! I killed him!" she shrieked, and breaking through the crowd of mourners about the casket she came and threw herself down on her knees at the Rev. Mr. Nelson's feet.

He drew back, startled, dazed, and gazed down at her, and every pair of eyes in the room followed his.

It was the maid, Agnes, who crouched there beside the flower-covered casket. The woman who had been in service to Jim Kaine's mother. The woman whose whole life had been spent in the employ of the Kaines.

"I killed him!" she moaned, in the dreadful silence that followed her first cry of self-betrayal. "But I did not mean to do it! It was her I meant to kill! I saw she was bad for his everlasting soul. She was like the foreign princesses that Solomon lusted after. She worshiped false gods. She made him wild like the beasts of the field! And she drove out Master Stephen.

"No single moment of peace did he have since she came, and I wanted to spare him. So I put the poison in her glass. I didn't think he would get it to drink from! I thought she would take her hot milk in it as usual. I didn't mean to kill him! As God above hears me, it was her I meant to kill."

"Hush!" cried the Rev. Mr. Nelson, bending over and lifting the woman who writhed at his feet in an agony of remorse. "'Vengeance is Mine, I shall repay,' saith the Lord. And He who giveth—only He who giveth may take away again that which He gives. May God the Father bring the light to your eyes and true repentance into your soul, Amen!"

Then he raised his head, and Quinn and another servant and Stephen Kaine led the woman who had killed James Kaine from the side of the dead man's casket, and the Rev. Mr. Nelson began his prayers by saying:

"God, I thank Thee for so moving me to speak that I have reached the sin-laden soul of this unhappy woman, my sister, and Thy daughter. Aid me yet further, that I may bring her once more to Thee, and receive into Thy presence, I pray Thee, the soul of James Kaine, already before Thee for judgment."

And so on, and so on until the end of the funeral service.

The Rev. Mr. Nelson scored a bigger sensation than he had imagined or counted upon, for the newspapers that night featured the story of Agnes's confession, and gave the Rev. Mr. Nelson's address in detail. Cora's reappearance was almost lost sight of beside this bigger development in the famous Kaine case; but no one objected to that in the least.

Three months have passed since that eventful day, and they have brought many changes.

Stephen Kaine is trying to prove, by means of alienists, that Agnes was not responsible for her actions in taking the cyanid of potassium from the Kaine garage (where it was used for some sort of repair work on steel), and in leaving it in Cora's glass. And, indeed, the facts seem to bear out his theory, for the old woman admits frankly that, when she realized she had killed Kaine by mistake, she found consolation in the hope that Cora would be suspected and punished for the crime.

Her devotion to the Kaines and her enmity against Cora are not at all normal in their intensity, and the chances are she will not be compelled to pay the death-penalty for her crime.

As for Cora herself, she is residing in her father's house again, and Scollard comes to see her there. Ann was married to Arthur Raines very quietly, a month ago, and both Raines and Scollard agree that they have found the woman.

(The End.)

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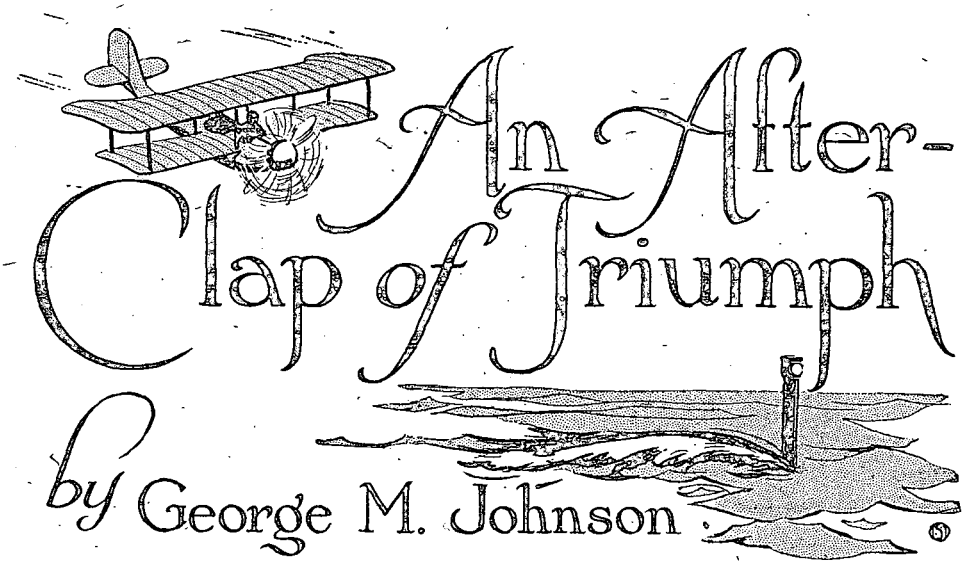

An After-Clap of Triumph

by George M. Johnson

IT was not the best sort of day for sub-scouting. The wind, gusty and unsteady, sang through the taut wire stays of the big aeroplane with a shrill whistle, which not even the roar of the motor could entirely drown.

Below, the restless billows of the gray Atlantic ceaselessly rose and fell, occasionally almost obscured by a patch of scudding mist. The ocean was not especially rough, but it looked bleak, desolate, forsaken—unfriendly to the last degree.

Tad Williams, strapped in the driver's seat, as he controlled the huge, birdlike machine with that unthinking instinct which comes only of long practise, let his mind wander back into the past for an instant.

It was just such a dark, sunless day as this, not so very long before, though it seemed like years, that had seen him with ten others fighting a desperate fight against a heavier team on the football gridiron. At that time their opponents' goal-line had seemed the goal of all worth-while ambition—a thing to strive after with the last gasp of breath and the last shred of nerve force.

Tad smiled to himself at the recollection. How trivial that seemed now, now that he was playing a bigger game—the biggest in the world.

It was only by ceaseless vigilance that Germany had been prevented from extorting a bitter toll of vengeance upon America for entering the war for humanity at a crucial moment.

The observer, in the seat beside Tad, reached over and touched him on the arm, pointing off to the left, where a dim, black hulk could just be distinguished. His lips formed the words:

"There she is," but the whistle of the wind and the drumming of the motor made his voice inaudible.

Tad nodded, and swung the plane toward the distant vessel.

Half an hour before, a code message had been received from the huge liner Abraham Lincoln, which lay disabled and helpless with a broken propeller-shaft well to the south of the customary path of transatlantic travel.

The Abraham Lincoln was one of the big interned German liners damaged by the German crews when American relations were severed, and seized by our government at the outbreak of war. As soon as repairs could be made, it was rechristened and put into service between the United States and England. Later it had been employed as a transport in connection with the earliest movements of American troops to the front in France.

Now this magnificent ship lay at the mercy of any submarine that might happen

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along, or that might have chanced to pick up and understood her code-call for help. The mere fact that she had originally been a German boat would, of course, never deter a sub commander from sending her to the bottom by the torpedo route.

It was as guard for the disabled ship that Tad and his comrade, Frank Tuttle, had been despatched in the big scouting aeroplane.

Frank was a young man of about Tad's age, who had left unfinished his course in a famous scientific school to serve his country in her hour of need. He had charge of a machine-gun and a supply of bombs to drop upon any submarine that was near enough the surface to be seen and destroyed. Constant practise on the aviation-field had given him a skill and judgment in bomb-dropping that was almost uncanny.

Tad cut down his speed as he circled over the disabled liner. A big crowd—crew and passengers—was assembled on the decks, and an enthusiastic cheer greeted the aviators as the people below saw that the plane bore the insignia of the American Flying Corps, and knew that it had sped out in answer to their call.

"Guess we're the first on the spot," mused Tad, swinging in a broad circle above the liner. "There ought to be a destroyer or two coming in sight before long, though naturally we'd be able to get here ahead of them."

The two strained their eyes in the effort to distinguish any undersea craft as they circled here and there, methodically hunting over the danger area around the ship. There was much scouting to be done, for a sub could launch its torpedo from a considerable distance with the absolute certainty of scoring a hit, as the big ship rolled motionless on the Atlantic swell.

Furthermore, if there were a sub around, it would not wait to get into a more favorable position when it once had spotted the aeroplane; the torpedo would be fired with no loss of time, whereupon the submarine would probably submerge to a depth that would make it invisible from the air.

For a second time Frank touched the pilot's arm, and pointed off toward the horizon. Faintly seen across the misty-gray surface was a smudge of black smoke against the leaden sky. A bit farther to the east was another smoke-cloud, still more difficult to discern.

"The destroyers are coming," he said.

"Sure," answered Tad—the two had learned to converse readily enough, though not a sound was audible—"but they're a good ten miles away yet. If there's a U-boat lurking around, those destroyers might as well be in the Pacific Ocean as here. The Abe Lincoln would be at the bottom of the blue briny before they could get near enough to fire a shot in her defense."

The plane was now fully three thousand yards from the disabled steamer, and Tad was on the point of swinging back for another circle, thinking that he was getting too far away, when suddenly something seemed to click in his heart.

The sensation was exactly the one he had always experienced when the opposing team in a big game kicked off, and he watched the pigskin oval soar into the air, presently to be gathered into a pair of husky arms, while the rest of the team surged forward into an interference line.

Below them, and quite a distance still farther out from the liner, was the cigarlike outline of a hostile submarine.

It is a strange fact that a sub, even when painted a dark color, appears a whitish-gray, quite conspicuous, as seen from an aeroplane above. Frank saw it at the same time, and his eyes met Tad's in a cool glance of understanding.

Their work was cut out for them; each knew it, and knew that upon the way they put through the task depended the salvation of the ship and all it contained.

Somehow, Tad was not at all surprised that the submarine was there. He had expected it all the time, and had also had a sort of hunch that he and Frank were destined to be the means of foiling the underwater pirate's murderous purpose.

The U-boat plowed steadily along, straight toward the liner, its twin periscopes not showing. Its action betrayed two things: that the commander knew the liner was just ahead and disabled, and that he did not know of the aeroplane's presence.

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Even as Tad maneuvered the airship to get into a favorable position for his companion's skilled work, the periscopes of the sub emerged.

Of course, when the latter were under water the boat was running blind, and undoubtedly the commander wished to verify his course—perhaps to see if he were near enough to launch a torpedo. Naturally, he would not choose to get too close, for all ships carried guns, manned by trained crews, who were simply itching for a chance to plunk a six-inch shell through the thin hull of a Boche sub.

Presently, Frank was satisfied; his right hand suddenly pulled a tiny lever, and two heavy objects dropped from the plane like plummets, the aviators both watching eagerly to note the success of the shot. Almost instantly they lost track of the falling projectiles in the mist that curled here and there over the billows. Then there burst out two great clouds of black smoke, mingled with white spray, as the bombs exploded, one of them fair and square just behind the bobbing periscopes, the other missing by a scant fifty feet.

The submarine disappeared abruptly, leaving the sea covered with that tell-tale oil film that always marks a successful shot.

But instead of a yell of triumph to celebrate the destruction of their enemy, the two looked one at the other with blanched faces—as though each were asking his companion if he had seen it, if there were not some mistake. And each read in the other's eyes the sickening truth.

The submarine had launched its torpedo while the bombs were falling, and even now, safely beyond the explosion zone, its compressed-air motors were driving the deadly missile at thirty or thirty-five miles an hour straight toward the unconscious liner.

The latter could not shift its position to get out of the way, even though warned of the approaching danger. They could easily beat the torpedo to the ship, but absolutely nothing was to be gained by such action.

Tad turned his plane in the direction of the liner, both occupants closely examining the ocean as they sped along, flying much lower than before. They were quickly rewarded by seeing the torpedo, apparently about eight feet under water, its progress marked by the escaping air-bubbles from the motors, the missile itself keeping a good distance ahead of the spot where the bubbles reached the surface.

Frank's fingers still rested on the bomb-dropping control, and a quick idea struck him. Tad seemed to grasp the thought at the same instant. But would it work?

Could they hit a twelve-foot torpedo, moving as fast as this one was moving? It offered a very different and far more difficult target than the submarine, which would appear as big as a battle-ship in contrast with the tiny torpedo. By now the latter had covered about half the distance to the liner.

At the crucial second, Frank coolly pulled his lever. At first nothing happened, and he gave a harder pull. There followed a peculiar snap as something broke, and then the six remaining bombs dropped all at once.

For the first time in their experience, in some unexplained way, the apparatus had failed, releasing *all* the bombs instead of the one that should have escaped. Still worse, the slight delay had thrown off Frank's estimates, and the bombs fell harmlessly, the nearest one exploding fully a hundred feet from the target.

And, with no more bombs, they had shot their last bolt, for the machine-gun was useless against the torpedo eight feet under water.

Tad gritted his teeth in sudden determination, as a wild, impractical scheme shot through his brain. They had one last bolt to shoot; it offered one desperate hope of success—a bare chance. By this time the deadly projectile was less than a thousand feet from the steamer, and headed squarely for it; a miss was impossible.

Tad looked at Frank, his face grim, and the latter understood. He nodded his assent.

There had been no particular concern among the crew and passengers of the Abraham Lincoln when the periscopes of a submarine had suddenly appeared under the circling aeroplane. Almost instantly had come the explosion, and an officer, watching intently through powerful glasses, had re-

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ported that the U-boat was destroyed beyond all question. A hearty cheer for the aeroplane and the men in it rang out.

But quickly after this came the puzzling behavior of the plane, and the mysterious dropping of the bombs. Suddenly a sailor up aloft grasped the truth.

"It's a torpedo!" he yelled. "They're trying to bomb a torpedo that the sub fired before the aeroplane got her!"

A second or two of suspense, then—

"I can see its wake now!" cried the lookout. "It's headed for us straight as a die!"

To the credit of American manhood, let it be recorded that there was not even the slightest suggestion of panic. The captain calmly gave his orders, and the crew as calmly set about obeying them.

The roar of the aeroplane motor sounded closer. By now the track of the torpedo was plainly visible from the ship—four hundred feet away—three hundred—a hundred and fifty—

"My God!" exclaimed a big voice through the quiet with which the steamer awaited its death-blow, "what are those boys going to do?" The voice rose almost to a scream. "They're going to ram the torpedo!"

The aeroplane, flashing along like a great hawk on the white trail of the torpedo, abruptly dipped; the roar of the motor stopped with startling suddenness, the quiet that followed contrasting weirdly with the drum of the engine that had preceded.

Then the machine volplaned straight down upon the dreadful cylinder, striking with a tremendous splash and the crash of crumpled wings. At first there was no explosion. Apparently one of the stays had hit the torpedo, carrying it far down below the surface. But then, in some way, the nose of the torpedo was bumped, perhaps against the motor or propeller, and the surface of the ocean boiled and seethed at the concussion.

In an instant a boat was over the side of the Abraham Lincoln. There appeared all too little hope that the aviators could be alive, but several remembered that the men had not been strapped in their seats, and that they had jumped clear—or tried to—a second before the plane struck.

There was a faint possibility that they might not have been dragged down with the wreck of the heavy machine. The heroes who had been so willing to toss their lives away would be rescued if such a happy outcome were humanly possible.

And rescued they were, though at first it seemed that both bodies recovered could not have a spark of life left in them. Frank was not badly hurt, and quickly revived under treatment. Tad, in the pilot's seat, had received the hardest knocks, but football makes bodies that can stand hard knocks, and plently of them.

As Tad's eyelids flickered under the beginning of his return to consciousness, his mind was again back on the gridiron.

"Did we win the game?" he muttered, his face wrinkled and moist with pain.

"Yes, my boy," gently whispered the surgeon, bending over him. "You won!"

THE SKY MEN

KINSMEN to winds are they,
  Cousins to clouds that run
With trailing laces of fire
  Across the face of the sun;
They mount until the world
  Becomes a misty plain,
Each river a silver thread,
And the mighty ocean-bed
  Naught but a purple stain—
Till heaven, in sapphire peace,
  Beyond all dimming rains,
Opens infinite space
To a new, soaring race,
  Whose wings are aeroplanes.

Harry Kemp.

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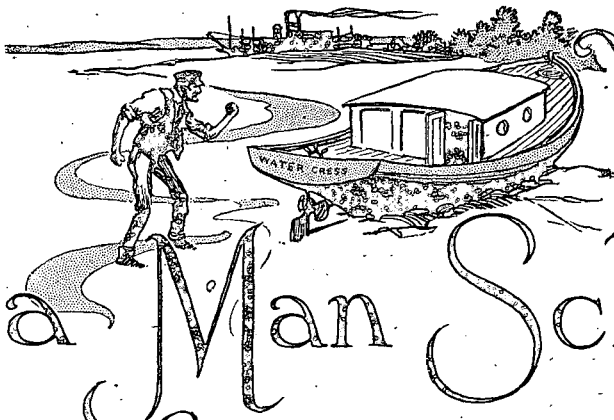

When a Man Schemes

by Raymond S. Spears

THE least agreeable lady on the Mississippi and its tributaries floated down the Tennessee from the neighborhood of the nitrate plant which has not yet been built at the Mussel Shoals canal and, having skirted along the frontier of Paducah, rounded the big, red heap of sawdust at the lumber mill and ran her shanty-boat to bank in the cabin-boat eddy above the steamboat landing at the wharf.

Her name was Mrs. Crell, and her daughter's name was Claire Belle.

Claire Belle Crell was nineteen years of age, a shapely, light-footed girl, with bright blue eyes, long wavy hair, and the witching type of smile which is called "sorgum 'lasses" as a kind of make-shift, there being in Mississippi nomenclature no adequate description to stir the imagination of those who do not know sorgum molasses.

What maple sirup is to buckwheat pancakes, what green cane molasses is to hoecake, sorgum molasses is to hot bread—and so a sorgum 'lasses smile is a kind and quality of smile found only in the sorgum 'lasses belt, and in its perfection, on the lips of a girl like Claire Belle.

Mrs. Crell, who was only a day over forty years of age when her blue-cabin, red-hull boat drifted into Paducah river town, was like her daughter in many respects—comely, bright-eyed, and fine-looking—but she was a fond mother, and she was living for just one thing in this world—and that was to bring her daughter up right and protect her from all evil, and do for her all things that a fond mother should do for a good and lovely daughter.

So Mrs. Crell kept a double-barreled shotgun, loaded with nine buckshot to the shell, in the corner behind the kitchen stove, and a fourteen-shot .38-.40 caliber repeating rifle, loaded with only nine shots (to preserve the elasticity of the magazine spring), beside her sewing-table in the living-room.

These weapons were an essential part of the outfit of two fine-looking ladies tripping the rivers, for the farther down the rivers they went the more dangerous were their surroundings.

Paducah, however, is only middling dangerous, as it lies half-way from perfectly safe Pittsburgh to the terrors of Red River old mouth on old Mississip'.

Now Mrs. Crelle saw just one perfectly safe way of taking care of her daughter, Claire Belle—that was to keep every man up the bank, or not less than thirty rods distant in midstream. This was her practise, and for that reason there wasn't a river-man from Pittsburgh, Knoxville, and St. Louis to New Orleans who did not regard the widow as the least agreeable lady on the rivers.

There were some men—no less than a dozen, in fact—who would have had no designs whatever on the daughter if only the widow had been kindly disposed.

There was one old steamboat captain who had retired from the cabin of the

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packet City of Louisville to become a shanty-boater at his ease, and one fair look at Mrs. Crell had determined him in his own mind that, despite his previous married experience, it was not good for a man to live alone.

Captain Dunlin foresaw no difficulties in his way. What mere shanty-boat lady could possibly resist a genuine steamboat captain, in the splendor of a fine new uniform?

Captain Dunlin strolled down to Mrs. Crell's boat, switching his cane snappily at posies growing on caved-down sod, and approached the lady as she embroidered something or other, sitting on the bow of her boat.

"Good evenin'!" he greeted her, smiling in a way to make an impression.

"What's your business?" she demanded tartly.

"Why—why—that's my boat up there—the white one," he told her. "I 'lowed I'd be sociable—"

"Oh—a shanty-boater!" she sniffed. "This isn't my society day."

Captain Dunlin blinked. He had thirty thousand dollars saved up in good, safe mortgages, and a house rented out in Cincinnati, to which he intended to retire when he should become too old to trip the rivers. To be treated like a common river rat surprised and annoyed him.

He glared, tried to think of a new approach, but gave it up. Then he tramped back up the bank and returned to his pretty little cabin-boat, and sat glowering at the proud and haughty river woman at a distance of one hundred yards.

By and by his countenance relaxed, and he smiled. It was a wicked, steamboat-captain smile. He had not been mate and captain in the local passenger service and river packet business for thirty years for nothing. Besides his money, he had a large sum of experience stored away. Many and many a time he had done the honors to proud women on board his steamboats. He prided himself with knowing something about what he called the sex.

Mrs. Crell had a daughter, and she had no husband—that was river history. The habits of the sex, Captain Dunlin decided, were that if one of them had a daughter, it was for the daughter that she lived. He began to muse on the question of what Mrs. Crell would be like if she didn't have a daughter to look after?

"She'd shore be mighty good-lookin'," Captain Dunlin mused. "But for the rest, she's a female, and that spells onsartinty!"

Captain Dunlin brought to the subject the thoughts of hours. A man who lives on the river in a cabin-boat has long days for thinking. The bitter years when one must toil, jumping to the cracking of one's ideas, give way on a shanty-boat to ease and comfort when the mind picks its own subjects and takes its own time in developing them.

Captain Dunlin thought of Mrs. Crell, and when she dropped on down the Tennessee, on her way into the lower river to spend the winter, he, too, drifted down—sometimes ahead of her, sometimes behind her, but never many miles distant.

The result was that Mrs. Crell regarded him as a confirmed old river pirate, and she was ready at a moment's notice to seize her clean, bright, efficient firearms and blaze away at him upon the first sign of an overt act.

Now, for three days, as she and her daughter floated toward Paducah, Mrs. Crell was nearly in a panic. Her daughter, less experienced, tried to soothe her mother, but without avail.

Captain Dunlin moored his boat about a mile above Paducah sawmill, which was probably a wise thing for him to do. Had he landed in the shanty-boat eddy, perhaps Mrs. Crell would have dropped him as he stood at his sweeps, and then, with her daughter as chief witness, proved that he had been annoying, following, and loitering in the vicinity of her boat, evidently with no good or proper designs.

There never was a jury in Paducah who would have convicted Mrs. Crell on the charge of killing Captain Dunlin, whose attentions, however natural, were ominous on the river. It is not fit and meet for any one to drift in pursuit of another shanty-boat—a woman has a right to be nervous, and two women four times as nervous.

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Now, Captain Dunlin had a number of friends in Paducah. He knew all the river shippers there, and the more he saw of Mrs. Crell, at a respectful distance, the more he determined to appeal to society and civilization for assistance in the problem which his mind had fixed for his own comfort.

Captain Dunlin went to City Marshal Belliver first; Mr. Belliver scowled at the idea of having anything to do with a subject relating to shanty-boaters, especially river women. To his mind, the question was unworthy of discussion; but for old times' sake, he consented.

The consequence was when Mrs. Crell and Claire Belle went up-town, Deputy Marshal Doscan followed. He spied upon the two until he learned that Mrs. Crell had a sister who lived out at Florence Station, and that they were going there for a few days' visit, leaving their boat in charge of the watchman of the coal fleet, who was a married man and who minded his own business.

So Captain Dunlin waited till the two had taken their departure, and then dropped down to Paducah shanty-boat town and tied in just below the coal fleet watchman's boat.

He found, sitting at the brink of the river-bank on a lump of sawdust, a morose and disconsolate young man. Something in the youth's appearance was familiar, and Captain Dunlin greeted him with a friendly nod.

"Howdy?" he smiled.

"Howdy," the youth replied; and then, with a sudden burst, he asked: "You're off the river, too, aren't you?"

"Yes. You?"

"Why — kinda, you might say. I'm traveling in a skiff."

"Ohio?"

"No; down the Tennessee—"

"Oh—I saw you up at the Shoals?"

"I ran them," the youth nodded. "They're from the Tennessee, too, in that blue boat."

"That's right. Do you know them?"

The youth rolled his blue eyes up and stared at Captain Dunlin's face.

"Perhaps I do, and maybe I don't," he ventured at last. "Do you?"

"The old one," Captain Dunlin replied cautiously. "I have what you might call a shotgun range acquaintance with her; too friendly to shoot me at a hundred yards with her thirty-eight, not friendly enough to let me inside of buckshot—"

"Well," the young man grinned, "you are lots better acquainted with her than I am. I'm one of the shoot-on-sight-at-eighty-rods friends of hers."

"Must be she's suspicious of you and—"

"The girl?" the youth grinned, blushing. "Yes, sir."

"Sonny," the captain smiled benevolently, "come with me!"

They went down on the captain's cabin-boat, retired to the galley, and proceeded to start a fire to put on a coffee percolator.

There they remained, drinking strong percolated coffee and getting acquainted.

"Yes, sir, cap'n." The youth shook his head. "The old woman sure would shoot me on sight. Y'see, two or three times I got to talking with Claire Belle. That was coming down to Decatur, Alabama. You know where that is. It was just luck, you might say; but I'm a Yankee, kinda looking around, and I saw the girl hunting squirrels up above in the hickories.

"Well, I helped her get two, three grays, and we were real friendly. The old woman hadn't seen me and my skiff, I s'pose. I never thought anything. I walked right down to their boat with her, and say! She give a look, a yell, and jumped for her gun—that's right! Mad! Claire Belle grabbed her, but I had to get to go right there. They pulled out and down the river. I was out of sight after that. Still, I got to see Claire Belle. You see how that was. Awful pretty girl, captain!"

"Takes after her ma," Captain Dunlin mused. "What you going to do?"

"Well, that's what's bothering me, to tell the truth. I'm no tramp, nor river rat, I tell you that. I've swapped and traded along—I pay my way."

"Course, I don't want to ask anything that you aren't willing to tell," Captain Dunlin remarked. "My name's Dunlin—"

"Beg pardon — I'm William Deverts, from Burlington, Vermont."

"I met a real nice party from Vermont

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years ago — excursionists on my steamer," Dunlin mused. "Let's see, what was that man's name? Copely—Copenly—"

"The Culbentlys?" Deverts exclaimed. "Why, it was their talking sent me down South to see the country! Dan Culbently and I went to college together—"

"Hum-m—it's a small world, sonny. You're traveling in a skiff?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, you bring your outfit on board here, and we'll travel down a while. I've been thinking—um-m."

"It's awful kind of you," Deverts laughed aloud, and then he grew glum again as he added: "I don't know if I'll go any farther. You see—I thought—"

"Mrs. Crells has a sister, Mrs. Threson, out at Florence Station," Captain Dunlin remarked. "She's just gone out there with the girl for a few days. They left the boat for the coal fleet man to watch."

"He told me he'd bought it and they'd gone to Texas."

"Course he said that," Dunlin smiled. "I didn't ask him. I got a friend up-town —ticket-agent on the railroad."

The youth's eyes sparkled.

"Captain," he exclaimed, "I've come five hundred miles looking for you. I had sure lost the trail—"

Both laughed, and they silently shook hands. Then Captain Dunlin raised his sobered countenance and looked the young man squarely in the eyes. For minutes they let their gaze study.

"Of course," Captain Dunlin said at last, "Claire Belle's a fine, clean river girl. They've places enough they could live at up the banks. She's got a farm leased out in her own right—three hundred acres of corn land up in Illinois. Her mother has quite a lot of money, too. They aren't exactly what you'd call society people, but they're river folks of the old kind."

The youth stared at the floor for a long time after that. At last he said, still looking at the floor:

"Well, I haven't any right to talk about anybody; she's a mighty interesting girl. The old woman made me mad, letting strip with her rifle the way she did. I thought she'd get me before I got into a bend in the bank out of sight. I saw the girl two or three times afterward, of course. I meant no harm. Claire's been through school, and she's read lots of books, same as I have. If the old woman hadn't been so darned mean, I'd been good friends. I'm not particular about her feelings now—"

"The girl's?"

"I'm honorable," the youth retorted.

"Well, we'll be good friends, then," Captain Dunlin smiled.

The two were good friends now. Deverts brought his rowboat up the eddy and made it fast to the stern of Dunlin's cabin-boat. He brought on board the gun cases, folding cot, cooking utensils, suit-cases, grub-box, and other duffel that comprised his outfit, and set them aboard the ample thirty-foot houseboat.

Then they went up-town, and the two met a lot of Dunlin's old-time friends, among whom the young man carried himself like the decent sport he was. Then one of them took Deverts for a ride casually, and they followed the road to Florence Station, as if by accident. There they stopped at the fence corner of a little farm, and the Paducah man patted Deverts on the back.

"There's the Threson place," he said. "We'd better look around. If Mrs. Crell's on guard, why, look out!"

And that evening, when this friend reported confidentially to Captain Dunlin, the old steamboat man smiled with satisfaction.

"Seems to me you take a lot of interest in that kid," the man remarked, "helping him out thataway!"

"I needed help myself one time," Dunlin smiled reminiscently.

Deverts found the Paducah people the most friendly people in the world, and there wasn't an hour of the day or night that he couldn't have commanded an automobile to take a ride out in the country—to Florence Station, say.

He was out there five times in one week —and Captain Dunlin learned that Mrs. Crell had told her sister that if she hadn't come out there, she didn't know what would have happened, a pestering old man having followed her down, and that after a

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river rat had bothered Claire Belle almost to death.

Captain Dunlin winced a little when he heard himself called an "old man." It was the doubt in his campaign, the strategy that he was playing which no one dreamed of him.

One day Deverts, his face blushing and his voice trembling, said to his partner:

"Claire Belle and I—you see, she—we've thought it all over, and we've looked at it careful. We won't have any better chance than that right now—I thought—she thought we could get married and beat it down the river. By and by, when her mother's good and lonesome, why, she'll take us back any time."

"Good boy!" Captain Dunlin cried out. "I knew you'd do it! Claire Belle's the nicest girl on the river—best blood there is, too! Why, her mother's one of the old Trent-Legerna family."

"My folks 'll be rearing," the youth puzzled. "You see, mother had a girl picked out for me, and my sisters had another one. Gee! You ought to have seen them! Why, Claire Belle's—"

"She's the kind we grow down here," Captain Dunlin chuckled. "And when you're ready, here's this boat! Take it! Drop down the river, and round a month or two you tow back up here with it, or I'll meet you down to Memphis. I'll write to New Madrid to you, and you write there, too, and if anything happens I'll kind of let you know."

"Why—I couldn't think of taking your home—"

"Tut, tut!" the captain laughed. "You're a son after my own heart!"

Lightly as he said it, the captain's heart thumped.

Two days later the Crells had made up their minds to return to the cabin-boat in Paducah eddy on the following Monday. On Saturday afternoon Claire Belle casually strolled down the road to visit a neighbor, and she entered a five-passenger automobile and rode into Paducah. Captain Dunlin had planned the details. Within three hours Mr. and Mrs. William Deverts had floated down under the railroad bridge below Paducah and were on their way into the Mississippi in Captain Dunlin's boat.

"That's all right!" he protested to the last. "I'm going to live up the bank a while, anyhow. This is a good excuse!"

No sooner was the cabin-boat clear of the bank, Claire Belle having packed and removed her things from the blue cabin-boat, than Captain Dunlin went out to the Threson place in a fast car belonging to one of his many friends. At the peach farm he tumbled out of the machine and rushed up to the house.

"Is Mrs. Crell here?" he demanded, and as that woman emerged from the sitting-room onto the broad veranda, her face hardened angrily. He gave the storm no time to break, continuing: "Madam, I saw your daughter going by in an automobile in Paducah, this afternoon, with a young man I happen to know is a skiff traveler down the Tennessee—Deverts by name."

"What?" Mrs. Crell cried out, her mother's heart in agony. "With him? Oh, quick! What shall I do?"

"I'd better—if I'd known—" The old schemer shook his head. "I'll telephone to some people there. The city marshal's a friend of mine!"

He telephoned to the city marshal, to the mayor, to the county sheriff. He called up the county judge and the city judge. Between calls, he turned to the trembling and frantic mother.

"Be calm!" he told her. "They'll telephone word around. They'll have every road watched from Cairo to Louisville, and they can't get away."

"Oh, but my daughter!" Mrs. Crell wept.

Captain Dunlin took full charge of the matter. He discovered the owner of the automobile by use of his intuition and his friends.

"We'll go find him, and see what he says!" Captain Dunlin declared.

And forthwith he bundled Mrs. Crell into the waiting automobile, and they were rushed by a begoggled man through the dust to Paducah. There they raced from place to place, from headquarters to county court, and in the county clerk's office they

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found, spread down on the records, that a license had been granted for the marriage of Claire Belle Crell and William Deverts.

"Married—oh, I'm so glad—the wretch!" Mrs. Crell choked, beginning to sob.

Then Captain Dunlin took her to the home of old friends of his, and the wife condoned with the mother who had lost her daughter, and Captain Dunlin told how he happened to recognize the girl's face, and knowing that Mrs. Crell was sister of the Florence Station Thresons, and that some one had said she was out there, and knowing how careful she was of her daughter, he had instantly surmised that perhaps something was wrong, especially as he knew about young Deverts following the Crells down the river, pestering them all the time.

"You know how river people talk," Captain Dunlin said to Mrs. Crell, who blinked and dabbed her handkerchief in her eyes as she admitted how kindly Captain Dunlin had been in looking after the matter.

"I—I don't know how I can ever thank you, captain." She shook her head. "After me taking all the care of that girl the way I did—to have her treat me this way! No one knows where they've gone!"

"If I'd only known." Captain Dunlin shook his head. "If I'd had the least suspicion about it! You see—that young scoundrel! He played a regular Yankee trick on me—yes, sir! I remember, now, it looked funny. I'd made up my mind to quit the river here at Paducah, and when a man came to me and said he'd buy my boat, I didn't think a thing. I sold it—and now that young scoundrel's into it down the river—"

"What?" Mrs. Crell exclaimed. "Down the river in a shanty-boat?"

"The last I found of them, they'd gone right to the river and gone down in that cabin-boat I sold that man."

The captain of the coal fleet confirmed Captain Dunlin's statement the following day. Claire Belle had been there, taken her things, and departed with them in Captain Dunlin's boat.

"If I'd suspected anything, Mrs. Crell, I'd sure stopped 'em!" The coal fleet man shook his head.

Mrs. Crell went down on her own boat, and Captain Dunlin accompanied her. She sat in her rocking chair, sobbing. The captain did his best to comfort her.

"Oh, I'll be so lonesome!" she cried. "I'd never dare live alone on the river, and Claire Belle—she deserted me! If she'd only let me know—why—we could have gone along together all right. I'd been—"

She burst into more tears, and Captain Dunlin hitched his armchair around beside the mourning river woman. She wept, and he patted her head and tried to put one arm around her waist, but she shivered herself loose from his soothing time and again.

Nevertheless, Captain Dunlin, having all his years of experience to draw on, established himself on terms of friendliness and with position of comforter for her. She did not know what to do. She could not bring herself to sell the beautiful little boat, which was the easiest one on the sweeps she had ever rowed; yet she could not bring herself to trip down the river alone. Never had she realized how much her daughter had meant to her.

Captain Dunlin saw that as yet Mrs. Crell had not gotten beyond the stage of having lost her daughter. There was no sign that she had reached a frame of mind where he thought it would be safe to begin an active campaign for substituting himself in her affections.

He needed something further — a compelling incident, as it might be called. Looking ahead, he had expected the loss of the daughter would be followed, as a matter of course, by the climax which he had presumed would be inevitable.

Mrs. Crell seemed inconsolable. Captain Dunlin did all that he could think of, as an old friend of the family, to assuage her grief, and for the moment he was greatly encouraged because he had been enabled to become as near as an old friend. He returned to his stopping place on the second evening after the elopement, assured in his own mind that all that was needed was some other happening which would prove to be the compelling incident.

In the morning, when he strolled down

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to the Paducah shanty-boat eddy, he had a surprise to compare with the time the boiler on the steamboat of which he was mate blew up. Mrs. Crell and her shanty-boat were gone, and the coal fleet man said that she had cast off her lines that morning and departed with the sun shining.

Captain Dunlin caught his breath and blinked. He was speechless. A contingency upon which he had failed to figure had arrived. He was left stranded up the bank, and over and above his astonishment was a lingering and growing doubt as to just the figure he had cut in the affair.

"I don't know anything about that young Deverts," he admitted to himself; "and likely he's a river pirate or a gold-bricker from the Hudson River or the Atlantic Ocean. I think—I don't believe I want to hang around Paducah long enough for any of the boys to get to thinking anything about me—Jee-hosaphat! What have I done?"

Hoping vainly, he sought the post-office for the mail. He went down-town to the steamboat wharf, and up-town to the River Men's Club, and out to dinner with a friend, and down to the river eddy for a look, and it occurred to him to telephone incognito to the Thresons at Florence Station; and he relieved Mrs. Crell's sister of much worry, for she had begun to wonder what had become of the widow, now that the daughter was gone. She seemed real pleased to think that Mrs. Crell had gone away from that old Captain Dunlin, whom she didn't like the looks of anyhow.

Captain Dunlin, who had impersonated an old friend of the family, hung up the receiver. He swore at women generally and particularly. He felt that he ought to have known better than to admire a woman for her looks instead of her actions. Mrs. Crell had been handy and mean with her guns and rifles, and now he was set up the bank with no boat and the makings of a first-class story of or when some one should suspect the true condition of affairs.

"And I was on the river thirty years—and knowed shanty-boaters!" he muttered to himself, making a gesture of supreme distaste for the part he had been playing. "I bet it was a put-up job!"

Captain Dunlin's boat was one of the best built houseboats on the river, having cost two hundred and fifty dollars painted; the outfit, including some of his most precious mementoes and collections, was of inestimable value. In cold blood, letting those river people trip down the river in it looked like the most insane thing a trustful man had ever done.

Captain Dunlin knew there was one thing he could do, and he did it. As always, there were several boats for sale in the Paducah shanty-boat town eddy, and one of them was a small semicruising motor-boat. Captain Dunlin bought it, and put on an outfit that was according to the boat—an oil-stove, folding cot, grub-box, *et cetera.*

He was a changed man when he started down the Ohio on his way to the Mississippi. There is something about Paducah that alters the career of many a river-man. Men have dropped into that sawmill eddy as mean and sorrowful as ever men could be, and in a day or two their whole outlook on life has changed. Then, again, men have been as cheerful as unpunished sin when they arrived at Paducah, and overnight they've become as ugly as though they had been caught in the act of something that means life imprisonment.

"He's come through Paducah's eddy," excuses anything on the lower river, whether joyousness like a bluejay's, or ugliness like a neighbor's pet dog.

Captain Dunlin had little hope of finding his cabin-boat by this time. He figured that he had been the victim of as clever a con game as ever was played between Pittsburgh and the Passes. Only luck could save him, his boat, and its precious relics. He bought himself a .30-.30 rifle and a .45-caliber automatic, and headed away down for New Madrid, where he and Deverts had agreed to cross letters. His own communication was brief:

> DEAR YOUNGSTER:
>
> I'm double-crossed and I know it. Leave word where you'll be 'long about the middle of November.
>
> DUNLIN.

"There," he told himself as he deposited the note at Cairo wharf-boat, "that don't

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show anything but good nature and disappointment."

The little motor-boat was the Watercress, a name that pleased the old river-man. When he rounded the bend and shot down the line between the Mississippi yellow water and the Ohio green, his anger and his grimness fell from him like a mantle.

Paducah had made a changed man of him, but he fought the natural gloominess which such disappointments commonly give a river tripper. Besides, steering a motor-boat under power was more like being somebody than pulling a pair of long oars on a shanty-boat — more like for an old steamboat captain. He had not known before what a pleasure a little motor-boat would be.

So he pounded down the reaches and bends, and scorned to land in at Putney Bend, where all the first trippers stop to catch their breath after their plunge over the great jumping off place of the hundred thousand miles of river.

He swung down Lucas, Beckwith-Hickman bends and steered jauntily into the chute of Island Eight—which is perhaps as lonesome a chute as there is above Memphis, woods and sand-bars on both sides, and the hint of piracies in the sinister Reelfoot Lake brakes over east in Fulton County, Kentucky.

Whisky boats used to load with moonshine along there, and many a tradition of cold-blooded murder originated between Hickman and Reelfoot Landing—Murrellites, and feuds and produce-boat pirates, and the like.

Captain Dunlin was feeling as jaunty as a card sharp when suddenly he felt and heard the rasping scrape of gravel on the hull of the Watercress. The bow of the boat slid up and up; and though Captain Dunlin threw on all his power, he succeeded merely in driving his boat higher on instead of clear over the bar.

"And me a river captain! And I've run on a reef in a falling river!"

Captain Dunlin stopped his motor and cursed. One consolation was that the river was only at a three-foot stage; and though it might go six feet lower, some time in December there would be a rise, and he could leave his dusty berth again.

"I forgot this danged boat drawed twenty-four inches!" he muttered. "A shanty-boat don't draw but eight!"

The river fell six inches by dark, and by dawn it was down six more. All the following morning the fall was steady and relentless. Captain Dunlin could see the gravel through the muddy waters. Happily, the Watercress was on an even keel.

He could sit and smoke and think of the hard luck that had followed him clear down on this trip. The wind that blew all day precluded the possibility of a shanty-boater dropping down and perhaps lending him a hand on a Spanish windlass, which might pull the boat off its gravel bed. Night fell, and with it the wind. A passing skiff man said a rise was coming down the Cumberland and Tennessee.

It was a warm evening, without a breath of air. Captain Dunlin smoked a pipeful, watching the sh- -at lights going by on the short cut through the chute as the migrant river people took advantage of the night calm to be on their way south for the winter. Some of them floated down within a hundred yards or so, and with two or three of these Captain Dunlin held brief interchange.

"Hello! Run aground?" one hailed.

"Yeh!" Dunlin replied. "I'm drawin' twenty-four inches, and there wasn't but fifteen here."

It was the kind of a river night when no one of the river life cares to sleep. Perhaps it is because on such nights a tornado may suddenly burst out of the southwest, or an earthquake of the seven a year New Madrid variety; perhaps it is because one feels the march of river spirits up and down the midstream.

A boat without a light swung into the chute and drifted down. As it approached Captain Dunlin heard some one sobbing—a woman's voice in the dark. As the boat floated abreast of him he hailed, and the crying on the dark boat ceased.

"You're going right down into a gravel lump!" Captain Dunlin warned. "Better pull sharp out!"

He heard quick footsteps in the cabin;

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and while he cursed people who floated dark, and didn't know whether they were going down chute, reach, or crossing, to the dismay of steamboat people, he heard the walls of the cabin-boat trembling like sounding boards to the scrape and clatter of gravel.

"There!" he called out. "Now you've run aground. That's what comes of being a darned fool floating at night, no lights and no watch!"

"That any of your business?" a tart voice replied. "If I want to float at night, it's none of your business; and what are you doing there in your boat, if you're not aground? I didn't suppose there'd be lack of water by a motor-boat."

"I'm running out here to calk seams!" he retorted. "That's what I'm here for. I'll be out dry to-morrow, and I'll calk—that's what I'm here for. I suppose you're going to windlass up the bank!"

The woman made no reply, and Captain Dunlin cackled scornfully. He felt a good deal of satisfaction at his display of ready wit, too. His boat would be dry enough to calk a seam anywhere by the following afternoon. He reflected that the cabin-boat on the gravel lump down the reef would be dry, too. He felt something like fighting, in view of his several worries and disappointments.

He turned in for the night feeling a good deal better. In the morning he slept late, and when he peered out the port eye he saw the cabin-boat careening somewhat on the lump. But at sight of that color his startled gaze saw blue and red; and if he knew boats, that was Mrs. Crell's.

"And I—and I sassed her!" he choked. "A man ain't safe to sass a woman. They never git over it, if you ain't married, and they don't have to!"

He cooked his breakfast without showing himself. He could see Mrs. Crell working in the stern of her boat, with door open, getting her breakfast. Every minute or two she would go out and lean over the side to look at the water. It was still falling. The starboard side was all dry, and the port side was only a few inches under at the stern, while the bow was six inches out of water.

"I got company, such as it is," reflected Captain Dunlin. "She ain't seen who I am yet. I bet I stay close for one while!"

Then he discovered that his water pail was empty, and that meant he must go thirsty or show himself, going down to the bluff reef to draw some water, for there wasn't enough around his boat by this time to fill a tin cup. Instantly his thirst became enormous, and his fear was increased in proportion.

Finally he caught up the rope bucket, and jumped over the far side and started down to the bluff reef.

"Good morning!" a sarcastic voice hailed him, and when he rolled his eyes up the woman continued: "You! Captain Dunlin—eh?"

"Sure!" he replied, for lack of better answer.

"And you let me drift down on this gravel bar!" she turned on him. "You didn't warn me till it was too late! What do you mean, and you sitting there smoking and not hailing to warn me!"

"Well," he replied, hesitating. "You see how it was. I wanted company!"

The handsome face of Mrs. Crell set with quickness of temper that was difficult to face, but Captain Dunlin had just about reached the limit of his patience and good nature. If any one wanted a scrap, all right. He wasn't looking for one, but he had stood about all he was going to and sing low.

"Yes," he continued, "I was willing to have company—if it was the right kind."

"You knew me—and you let me run on a gravel bar!" she cried. "And I thought you was a friend!"

Her voice broke ever so little, and at that sign of her feminine suffering Captain Dunlin saw that he was a brute.

"I didn't notice you were in close enough to hit that lump," he explained. "I heard some one crying—it kind of broke me up a minute, and when I yelled it was too late. I'm looking for that girl of yours—but I hit the bar myself—forgot I was drawing twenty-four inches 'stead of eight!"

"Oh!" she caught her breath. "Aren't we two old fools!"

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"Not so old as we might be!" he retorted gallantly; adding quickly: "I believe I can rig a Spanish windlass and work you down over that lump. There's deep water in the eddy below it."

"If you could!" she breathed. "I'm just sitting down to breakfast—won't you come have some?"

"Why—why, Mrs. Crell! Sure I will!"

Captain Dunlin had four hundred feet of handy-line on his boat and two three-sheaved blocks. He set his own and Mrs. Crell's mud-hooks down in the deep water, with their heavy lines, using her skiff. Then he rigged the handy-line through the blocks, and having shoveled away the most of the lump under the bow, the two of them set their weight against the haul line and tipped the houseboat over into the shallow water, and it began to slide down the slope of the gravel.

"That's a light boat!" he exclaimed. "We got it coming!"

In less than four hours the little houseboat was afloat again on the chute, and Captain Dunlin coiled his rope on the motor-boat roof to dry it out, while Mrs. Crell cooked dinner.

Mrs. Crell had her mud-hook up on the bar to hold the houseboat from floating away down the chute.

"There's a strong wind blowing," she said and shook her head. "I couldn't float out on the main river to-day! I've been dropping down nights. It's awful. You've no idea how lonesome it is without that—that girl of mine."

"I've been alone twenty years," Captain Dunlin said sadly, and he, also, shook his head.

"Being alone on a steamboat isn't like being on a shanty-boat!" she replied quickly, and then, seeing her mistake, she added: "Of course, you've been shanty-boating lately."

Captain Dunlin noticed that there wasn't enough wind on the main river to prevent the floating of a cabin-boat if one really wanted to hurry on. He saw that Mrs. Crell was just plain lonesome—that being alone had gotten on her nerves. It made him feel like a strong, protecting kind of man.

"Couldn't we get the Watercress clear?" she asked.

"There's a fresh coming down the Cumberland," he told her. "Big rain up in Kentucky and Tennessee. It 'll be down about the twentieth."

"That's Saturday," she mused. "Claire Belle dropped me a card, saying she'd write me to New Madrid. I'm anxious—"

"You—you needn't wait on my account!" he exclaimed. "There's nothing—ah! See that water?"

He pointed up the chute. A wave had rolled over a wide, low level of sand. A visible swell came down the chute.

"She's turned—now it's rising again!" he exulted. "That's the Tennessee and Cumberland fresh!"

They were standing in the doorway of the cabin-boat, close together, so close that Captain Dunlin blinked at the sunshine. They stood there a long time in silence. They waited, they said, to see the two other waves that show the turn of the river tide from ebb to flood. As the third wave rolled down, Captain Dunlin's arm slipped around the back of the widow, and tentatively, with great caution, his right hand caught against the apron band.

"Cap'n!" she whispered. "Cap'n!"

"Lawse!" he replied. "I've been—I've been hoping—"

He kissed her, and she buried her face in his shoulder.

"So've I been hoping, cap'n!"

"I've a parson friend at New Madrid," he declared. "We'll get him!"

"Cap'n," she cried suddenly, "you'll have to wade! You'll get your feet wet going to your boat!"

"I don't care if I have to swim!" he laughed. "Hue-e!"

"Soon's we're afloat — perhaps we'll—perhaps we'll find those children!"

"Sure we will!" Captain Dunlin cried out. "He was going to write me at New Madrid and—"

"Cap'n" — Mrs. Crell started up and away from him—"going to write to *you!*"

Captain Dunlin blinked. He saw that, by all the tormented luck that had followed him, once more he was caught and twisted and betrayed.

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"You—you helped that man steal my girl!" She turned on him, infuriated. "What'd you do that for? What do you mean by that?"

There it was in plain English! Mrs. Crell had her suspicions now. All that she had ever believed of men now proved true. Captain Dunlin saw all his fine hopes going a glimmering before the hot temper of the enlightened widow—and they weren't married yet, and she needn't to get over it, and probably wouldn't.

"Answer me, sir!" she commanded. "What do you mean, getting a poor widow's daughter stole?"

"Why," he grimaced, "I—you see, I—I couldn't get the widow for myself no other way, so I—so you see, I—"

"Umph!" she sniffed, her lips twitching. She turned away. Captain Dunlin saw in that gesture the fruitlessness of all his efforts and the failure of all his hopes.

But after a time the widow edged around, and returned to look at the river captain.

"Captain," she said meekly, "how do you reckon an old river woman like me happened to hit that gravel lump on a falling river when nothing ever drifts to shore, but sucks out from it?"

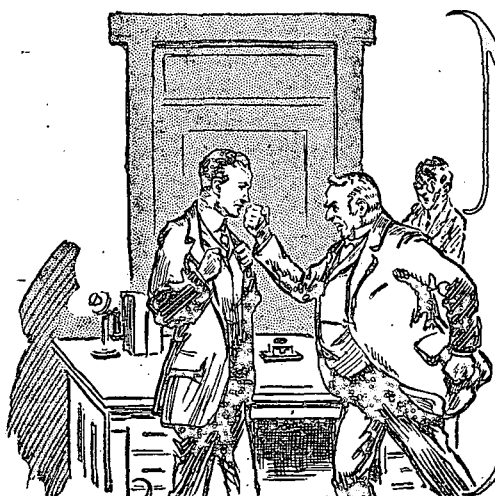
"Why—I—why, I hadn't thought!" he gasped. "That's so! How'd it happen?"

"Well, you had to drive your motor, and I had to pull my sweeps—that's all. A fisherman up here said you was aground in the chute," she laughed; "and, captain, I was sure just as lonesome as I said. Lawse! When I saw up to Paducah what game you'd been playing on me, a lonely old widow, I was—I was just boiling! But, captain—sho!"

Captain Dunlin was once more happy.

This time he saw that there was no further cloud to rise between him and his contentment.

At the same time, when he happened to think of it below New Madrid afterward, and when his wife reminded him from time to time, he had his doubts as to just how much of a scheme he had played, and how much fate had had to do with his happiness.



Nunky Comes Across

by Frank A. Russell

MR. JAMES COCHRANE had tasted the cup of joy that is served up at every properly organized honeymoon, and had for two blissful weeks experienced the surpassing paradox that, drained to the dregs as it was by Mary and himself, it was still running over.

They had chosen Sydney, city of delight, for their holiday, and Jim had naturally picked the only hotel he had had personal experience with, which also happens to be the most expensive—the Hotel Australia.

"Cablegram for you, sir," the hurrying waiter said, as he interrupted one of those

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breakfasts at which, to newly-married lovers, the food is ambrosia and the drink nectar.

Idly Jim took it, and with brief apology opened it.

"No bad news, Jim dear?" asked Mary.

What bride of two weeks fails to see in every ripple on the surface of life a wave that is about to engulf her happiness?

Jim was staring at the white slip with puzzled eyes. He could make nothing of the message. The signature, "Horrocks," had a familiar look, but the rest of the cable was Greek to him.

"Bad news, honey? Here, get an earful and tell me what you think of it. I guess it must be some one with a sense of humor on the blink. Funniest thing a man can do nowadays is to get married, and his friends all seem to want to let him know they can be funny, too."

Slowly he read the message:

"'*Benedick* lost. Urgently require two more *Katharina* and *Petruchio* class. Have entered binding contract, heavy penalties breach. Last day August tenth. See cables Hassall. Horrocks.' Does that get you anywhere, hon?"

To his surprise, Mary looked furious.

"That's a piece of insolence, Jim. I wish I knew who sent it. Two more of the *Katharina* and *Petruchio* class, indeed. And as if we didn't know we'd made a binding contract—such a way to put it."

The new Mrs. Cochrane twisted the bright ring that proclaimed her glorious servitude, and positively flushed with annoyance.

"I don't quite get you, sweetheart," Jim replied. "What's the dark insult hidden in those flossy names? Who was *Benedick*, and where did he lose himself?"

Mary explained. Jim had never tried to deceive her by insinuating that scholarship, save in worldly wisdom, was his long suit.

"They're characters in Shakespeare's plays, Jim, my ignorant angel. The point is that *Katharina* and *Petruchio* were married and quarreled like Kilkenny cats, and this wretch insinuates that we've entered their class."

Mrs. Jim looked ready to cry, but Jim was equal to the occasion.

"And this *Benedick* dub, who was he?" he inquired, reading the cable again.

"He's another character."

"Bad?" asked Jim.

"N-no," confessed Mary, "but he married a girl called *Beatrice* in a stupid sort of way. He was pushed into it, in fact—Oh, that man is a b-brute," she broke off, but it was really because she knew that the hint of troublesome sobs in her voice would be likely to provoke the same soothing remedies from Jim. And she was right.

"What do we care, deary. Let 'em jibe. But what beats me is who the joker is. Horrocks—the name's familiar. What Horrockses have I bumped into? And what's this date, August the tenth? And who the—"

"Devil," prompted Mrs. Jim. "Keep your small vices, Jim, or I'll think I married a stranger."

"Is this man Hassall?" finished the puzzled James.

"Never mind the blessed cable, Jim. What are we going to do to-day?"

The pretty face, with its expectant look, was quite enough to put the unexplained wire and its literary associations out of Jim's head. They spent a riotous day, mooning after the wont of all their kind.

In late afternoon, Jim found his way, as was his custom, to the American consulate. Expatriated as he was, he was in no danger of forgetting that he was Uncle Sam's child, and he could not have existed happily without the help of American papers. The consulate is a sort of club for these wanderers.

A paragraph in the San Francisco *Examiner* caught his attention, chiefly because it contained his own name, which jumps to the eye quicker than any other combination of letters. He read it, only to find that it referred to his uncle, the shipping king of the Pacific slope.

It announced his forthcoming departure for Australia, partly for reasons of health. The paper was a month old.

I do not know whether I have made it clear that the mind of Mr. James Cochrane moved with rather more than ordinary smoothness and clarity. He had no sooner read the item than he drew out the cable

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message that had so offended his wife, and, after perusing it many times, fell into so prolonged an abstraction, that a slightly offended official had to remind him three times that he was about to close up for the night.

Thus awakened to the realization that there was a world and that a honeymoon separation, if prolonged, requires lengthy explanation, he hurried back to his home, if such a title of dignity is not hyperbole, when applied to a hotel.

Mary, all smiling welcome, noticed his rather excited manner, and was quickly taken into her husband's confidence.

"Have you ever heard me mention my Uncle James, Mary?"

"Yes, Jim, but never very nicely. I think he treated you abominably, and I'd like to tell him so."

"You might have the chance pretty soon, at that," was the reply. "I've solved the mystery of the cable, and there's going to be big doin's, little girl. Uncle James is going to be hit with half a brick, unless I miss my guess, and he won't know what touched him. Have another squint at this, and forget all about those base insults that man Shakespeare threw at you an' me.

"We're going to suppose that this message is really meant for the man who was James Cochrane before I ever came into this little old globe and pilfered it from him. That's my pleasant old Nunky. Now it becomes clear as your pretty eyes, honey. I've got Horrocks nailed down in my mind. I knew I had heard the name.

"He's the manager of the Cochrane Shipping Corporation, which makes the biggest noise on the Pacific slope. That outfit shouts, where the next biggest whispers. Now, what would Horrocks be cabling the old man about? Shakespeare? Guess again. Ships. S-h-i-p-s, that's what.

"Lord, it all comes back to me. They've got a fleet of ships in the Atlantic that all go by names dug up out of Shakespeare's plays. Well, like every mother's son in the game just now, they're losing boats through the submarines and wanting more and more all the time. The Benedick's been lost since Uncle James left home. That's plain.

"Why is he coming to Australia? His health? Nix. He's got a constitution like a megalo-thingummy. He's come to charter ships. That's a safe bet. They've been cabling about the matter to a guy of the name of Hassall. Don't know who he is, but I will. And the firm want two more ships of the class of the Katharina and Petruchio. Begin to see it, dear? Oh, Lord, I can just imagine the holy fear they're in at the chance of losing cargoes and breaking their contracts."

"Then the cablegram isn't for you at all, Jim?" Mary asked.

"Bless your innocent little heart, of course it isn't. The old man is evidently going to put up at the Australia when he lands, which he hasn't done yet, that's a cinch."

"At this hotel? Oh, how nice! After I tell him what a bear he was to be so cruel to you, we'll be the best of friends. It's only right we should show him some attention and make his stay pleasant."

Jim laughed in keen enjoyment.

"You'd better believe I'll show him some attention. He'll be welcome as the lambs in season on Wall Street. You don't quite understand James Edward Crocker Cochrane, sweetheart, so I'd better warn you that he's not the sainted uncle of fiction. If you get near enough to tell him he's a bear, he'll crunch every dear little bone in your body. Fee-fi-fo-fum—you'll be seeing a real, live ogre for the first time when Uncle Jim drifts in."

"Pooh, you don't know the way to go about it," declared Mary in confident tones. "It would be a capital thing for you if you and he became friends. Think what an influence he would be! He must have millions."

"You mercenary creature! He has millions, but I'm willing to put over a bet that he'll have less when he leaves this fair land."

Jim grinned at his mystified bride.

"You're up to mischief, Jim Cochrane," accused Mary; "you've got a wicked eye. What are you going to do to your poor uncle? When you married me, you promised to give up all your evil ways."

"I'm not going to hurt the old dear, Mary, but I'm going to make him admit

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the error of his ways. When I was a youngster I held a position in the Cochrane Corporation. All my loving family thought my fortune was made. So did I, for that matter, and so I spent it, beforehand. I don't want to boast, but the little village of San Francisco certainly knew your bad little boy. They used to say that visitors asked on landing what the pink haze was, and they were told it was the faint afterglow of the red with which the younger set painted the town."

"What has this horrible confession, of which you seem to be so proud, got to do with your uncle?" demanded Mary severely.

"Why, uncle provided the paint and brushes I used, though he didn't get wise to it for a spell. When he did, you'd better believe there was some little powwow. One result of it was that the old boy, who at that time called himself James, Sr., took to using his second name, Edward. Guess he sort of suspicioned that my high jinks called for more cash than generally stood to my credit, and that I might get absent-minded some fine day and wander into his bank, with the name of James Cochrane on the wrong slip."

"Jim!" exclaimed the startled Mary, "surely he didn't think you would rob him?"

"P'raps not, but Nunky is a business man, who takes no risks he can ensure. I bore him no grudge for that. But he soon got the crankiest notion that ever an old lunatic was cursed with."

"And yet you say he's a good business man. What did he go crazy about?"

"Well, he got the idea that as he was paying me three thousand dollars to work for him, I should do that work instead of going on with my real ambitions."

Mrs. Jim looked as though uncle might have some shadow of right on his side.

"And what were your real ambitions?" she asked.

"They used to change a good deal," Jim admitted, "but at that time I recollect I was collecting every kind of drinking utensil to be had in our great republic. I was said to have more steins, tankards, mugs, glasses of all descriptions, and pails, than any other collector in the West. There, I'm only joshing, honey. Don't look so scandalized. The fact is, I was no more fond of work than any other youngster who has unlimited dollars to throw around on foolishness. The point is that Uncle Jim threw me down hard, presented me with the key of the street, and told me to make instant use of it. His conversation was full of remarks that I violently disagreed with, but the thing that stuck in my memory was this:

"'Go to the devil, if you like, but take a road that my front windows don't look out on. It annoys me. I had hopes you might have developed brains in this business. I could have done with some one to take on my work after I quit, but from what I've seen of you, I would not trust you in anything more delicate than buying a nickel balloon in the street. And at that you'd let the dum thing go. Your hands were never meant to grip anything more valuable than a cocktail glass. When you can show me that you've mastered the elements of business, and if you cut out high-balls for keeps, I might use you. Till then the office boy has instructions to keep you out of here with the other bums. Shut the door as you go out.' That's my recollection of the exact conversation. And you wonder what pretty welcome you can give him."

"He was an old fool, but you were a young one," was Mary's verdict. "And now what are you thinking of? Some dark treachery, I'll be bound. Jim, I won't let you revenge yourself. That's petty. You admit you were in the wrong."

"This isn't revenge. It's a serious effort to get back into Nunkipoo's good graces by the method he suggested himself. I'm going to show him that I'm a business man after his own heart. He'll admit when I've shown him that I've mastered the elements, and gone one or two better. Don't you worry that dear head of yours. Honest to God, I'm running as straight as a string."

"You're not going to disappoint that poor old man's hopes of doing his business in this country, are you?" A faint line of disapproval had come into Mrs. Jim's brow.

"On the contrary, I'm going to provide him with what he wants—what a dutiful nephew I am. I let bygones be hasbeens,

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and rush up to my relative with the very articles he wants."

No further questioning could draw more from the grinning Jim.

Next day he made inquiries as to incoming boats, to discover when he might experience the dubious pleasure of encountering his redoubtable uncle. He found he had five days before him.

His immediate action was to wire to Melbourne for his lieutenant, Bunny Harding, with whose assistance most of his coups had been brought off. Bunny, whose time was given to inventing pleasures which might exhibit him as not wholly unworthy in the eyes of the lady who had annexed him and his possessions, would not be likely to allow even the caprice of a fiancé to interfere with the necessities of the admired James. This summons to butt into the pure bliss of a honeymoon proclaimed its own importance, and by the morning of the second day, Bunny, uncaged and joyful, reported for service.

In a few words the matter was explained.

"I've cabled Horrocks for a repeat of the cable I annexed," added Cochrane. "That ought to be here in plenty of time for Nunky. I want him to get to work hunting for his tonnage. But we've got to hustle like Billy Sunday after a lost soul.

"Here's the position: I've been sniffing around. There are demands on shipping at present such as the old world has never known. And take it from me, son, it's going to get worse. Those submarines may not give Germany what she wants—a full tummy—but they're going to make it worse and worse for the rest of the world. It stands to reason, then, that there's not much tonnage left lying round looking for a job.

"Your work will be to start right in with all the shipping companies, and see if there's any sum within reason that will tempt 'em to charter. Unless I'm 'way out, you'll find they stick closer to their ships than to their wives. The whole Australian wheat crop for the season has been bought by the British government, and that's got to be moved where it will do the most good.

"But it's clear from that cable that the Cochrane lot in Frisco have been chasing something in this country, and something big. What that is I'm not wise to, but it goes by the name of Hassall.

"Now there's no Hassall in the list of ship-owners. My job is to find out who he is, and how far these birds on the other side have gone. I've got a big idea, if we can locate him soon enough.

"Now, get busy, old son. Here's your list, and there's a handy telegraph office they tell me at the post-office. With luck we ought to have replies from them all in three days at the outside. Then if I'm right, the band will play. Oh, for the glorious moment when I shall strain my eyes at the sight of darling uncle coming across!"

Bunny proceeded to carry out his appointed task, and Jim set out to run Hassall to earth.

He rather favored Sydney as the habitat of his quarry, partly because that port has such close relations with San Francisco, partly because his uncle was coming there, and evidently to stay, as he had given the hotel address to his office, and partly because Jim always played a "hunch" to the limit.

Every Hassall in the city directory he passed through the comb, provided they had telephones. The others he dismissed. He found that the name was fairly common in Sydney, there being no fewer than twelve. His method with the first was indicative of that with all.

Jim on the telephone.

"Is that Mr. Hassall's office?

"Yes. Is that Mr. Hassall, the shipping man?

"Sorry, I was given your number. By the way, do you happen to know any one of the name in Sydney interested in shipping?

"I see. Thanks. Sorry to have troubled you."

His difficulty was that he could find in no instance any hint of the connection of any one of the name with shipping. He was by nightfall very discouraged, and inclined to run over to Melbourne and try there.

It must be remembered that Sydney and Melbourne are the two great Australian ports, and every shipping firm in the coun-

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try would have offices in one, if not both of the cities.

He sent a telegram to the lawyer who had carried through one or two pieces of business for him in Melbourne, and put the query to him and then, perforce, waited for the answer.

Next day the replies to Bunny's telegrams began to come in. They were all as near a laugh as a wire can get. The tenor was the same. The firms were using all the available tonnage and could use more if it was obtainable.

At this, though confirming his own prophecy, Jim began to wonder whether there was any advantage in further inquiry. Surely the local men who were clamoring for more ships would be the first to know of anything charterable, far more so than an American who was so far from all sources of real knowledge.

When he had begun to despair of carrying through his plan, light came.

He was in the bar of the hotel that night when a chance remark from a fellow sufferer to get a third caught his ear.

James Cochrane in after life would tell many an enterprising reporter for the Sabbath papers that the answer to the evergreen question propounded to millionaires, dealing with the royal road to riches, was in his case two rather large ears, held ever open to catch remarks which to the ordinary man held no vestige of interest.

In the case in question he heard a man say in a fairly bored tone, "Well, I see Appenrodt's case is nearly through. I hear the injunction's going to be quashed tomorrow. Fancy tying up that fleet all this time."

"Trust the lawyers to tie up anything so long as their costs are safely provided. They're making over two hundred a day in fees alone."

"Nice thing for Hassall. He's lawyer and executor."

The men moved off, but James had his information. To get the paper and read the report of the case was his first act, and the threads of the whole affair were in his hands.

He now knew who Hassall was and where he was to be found. The ships Uncle James were after were the property of a German, who died just in time to create a most unholy muddle for his estate. His nationality had started the trouble the lawyers had fostered, and the ships that formed his estate had been held up by an injunction of the high court and prohibited from any dealings whatever, pending the trial of the main suit.

The application of the executor, Hassall, to be allowed to charter the vessels and pay the charter-money into court, thereby defeating the injunction was, according to the detailed report in the newspaper, about to be granted.

Jim sent in his card next day, after the court had risen. The lawyer received him with great courtesy.

"Been expecting you for some little time, Mr. Cochrane. You must come round to my club. We must make you comfortable while you are with us. And how are things on the other side?"

Jim laughed genially.

"To tell the truth, one gets very quickly out of touch. Still, everything goes well, I'm glad to say."

"You shipping men are making fortunes," Hassall jibed. "You will be sorry when peace breaks out."

"Oh, we're not barbarians, Mr. Hassall. Well, now, here's a cable I got from the Coast," and he drew out Horrocks's wire. "Let me see; perhaps the best thing will be to ask you to let me have the cables you have received in connection with this chartering matter."

The lawyer didn't hesitate. Why should he? He was expecting James Cochrane, and James Cochrane turned up, and with a cablegram that was a credential in itself. He rang his bell.

In two minutes the papers were open for Jim's inspection.

He quickly mastered them. They were few in number and showed that the late Appenrodt had had dealings with the big American corporation in the past. On his death the prompt offer to charter the vessels, which were four in all, had come from San Francisco.

The suit had held the matter up, calling for the presence of Uncle James to speed

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up the charters, when the law had done its worst.

Jim looked up from his reading.

"I've been thinking, Mr. Hassall, that it will be much the best thing, if we can come to terms, for me to take a contract in my own name. It will facilitate the matter and save a deal of time."

Hassall replied pleasantly:

"Just as you wish, Mr. Cochrane. You have brought, of course, a power of attorney, so that your authority cannot be questioned?"

This was a poser. Jim had not reckoned on the necessity of such a document. But his native wit and impudence came to his aid. With hardly a pause for thought, he smiled.

"Power of attorney? Not much. I've got something that makes a louder noise than a power of attorney. I want to pay spot cash for what I'm buying. That lets you out of a considerable amount of worry."

"Oh, there's no worry where the Cochrane corporation is concerned," Hassall remarked.

Jim was too wary to allow this to remain unchallenged.

"That's just the point. The corporation has been in negotiation with you, but it doesn't always do to have too many cards face up on the table. The corporation has enemies, you know, and too much information is bad for trade rivals."

Jim smiled in a manner which was meant to convey to the other a flattering impression that a nod was just as good as a wink to a blind horse, and that he knew a shrewd fellow when he met one.

"Just so, just so," replied Hassall, who was not a shipping man, but a lawyer.

He still made objections, and Jim jumped in with a suggestion that sounded like a concession to the other's caution, but which, if accepted, was precisely what Jim wished.

"Tell you what I'll do, Mr. Hassall," he said. "If we can come to terms, I'll take a three weeks' option on the vessels I want and pay you a sum that will be heavy enough to show you I mean business. That will protect you, for you will have the cash, and in the mean time I can get whatever guarantees your legal caution can suggest. I take it you want to get the matter fixed up at as early a date as possible, for the sake of your trust. The soundness of the financial position of the charterers is naturally your chief concern. I have in Sydney banks a sum which is more than necessary to satisfy your purposes, so I suggest that we get to business right away."

The sum per ton was fairly heavy, as was to be expected in these days, but it was not excessive. Nevertheless, Jim objected, on principal, intimating that there were other ships in the market.

This brought him the retort that he was angling for and Hassall soon showed him plainly that there was not an idle ton of shipping in the country.

"I could have chartered these boats a hundred times over if they had been free, but even before my client's death he expressed a wish that his old friend should have them, if he required them. By the way, Mr. Cochrane, you are much younger than I expected. I thought that you would be about sixty-five."

Jim roared with laughter, to gain time for thought.

"That's the old man, old Edward C.," he explained. "I'm James, his nephew."

"I see. So they put this sort of work on to you."

Now Jim was too shrewd not to know that misrepresentation would be fatal, so he covered the truth cleverly as he replied:

"Well, hardly, but my uncle was very anxious that I should win my spurs in business, so I took it on. It really is pretty easy, as you Australians make everything run so smoothly."

Smooth! Not a circumstance to the smoothness of James Cochrane.

"I believe the old man is going to run over here shortly himself. He'll enjoy seeing you, Mr. Hassall," the daring Jim could not resist adding. It was a good move, too, as it cleared the way for an explanation afterward.

When he left the office it was arranged that the document giving him the required option should be ready for signature next day.

With the precious option, for which he had paid a pretty stiff price, in his pocket,

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Jim felt that he could await the arrival of his august relative with equanimity.

The meeting duly took place. The pity was that there was no artist, either in words or color, to depict the scene for future generations.

Uncle James was short and stocky, but he made up in a dignity which enwrapped him in awful majesty whatever he lost in mere inches. His white hair curled sparsely round a dome like that of the capitol. A voice like a trombone reminded the forgetful that this mighty man had once commanded his own ship through many years, which had fastened on him a mask of mahogany.

He still walked with a roll, and terrified the most casual acquaintance throughout the most trivial conversation with a bloodshot eye that bored through to the backbone. The encounter took place in the lobby. The old man stopped suddenly, as if frozen in his tracks. Then, in a voice that was meant to pierce the din of a sou'wester, he called out:

"Well, damn me if it isn't that scoundrelly nephew of mine. H-m! Still sticking where the cocktail river rises, I see."

"How de do, uncle?" said Jim affably, but did not pause for a reply. "What in the world brought you to this country? America get too warm? I've heard they're clearing all the grafters out."

The pleasant voice robbed the words of any sting they might have had.

"H-m!" growled Uncle James. "If they did that they'd empty the cities."

"You haven't told me yet what brought you here," the other reminded him.

"Don't know that I've got to, either," was the retort. "Suppose you tell me what you do to earn those classy clothes you're sporting. You look as if you'd found some suckers on this side. Lord, they must be pretty easy."

"Oh, there are suckers enough, but I'm not in the wool business now."

"What business are you in? Time you were reaping a fairly heavy crop of wild oats. Whad'ye doing?"

"I've taken your advice to heart, Uncle James. I've gone in for serious work. At present I'm in the shipping game."

"The devil you are! And what do you ship?"

"Whatever offers," the smiling Jim replied. "I've just completed a big deal."

The old man made a noise that an unprejudiced person would never have taken for a laugh.

"Huh!" he commented, "big deal, eh? I suppose you stand to make quite a hundred dollars. What do you ship? Potatoes across this dinky little harbor? I think I see the dubs who'd trust you with good dollars for any shipping service you can sell them."

"I fancy I can see one of those dubs, too. Funny things happen at times. I'm married, too."

"That 'll break the hearts of the girls back home," sneered James, Sr. "Where did you get your wife? They have gals bartending over here, so I can guess."

"You'd better guess again, then. See here, Uncle James. You can laugh yourself into a stomach-ache at me and my ways. You've got reason to, but my little wife is in a different class from you and me, and so I want you to speak softly whenever you mention her, see?"

"My, you're all het up. Don't worry. The sacred name shall never pass my lips."

Jim got up to go, though the drinks he had ordered had not come. He was feeling hot and sore.

"I find you're less fascinating than I thought," he said, "so I'll leave you alone. I must tell you that you're liable to find me reminding you most any time now that I've learned business ways," he added, as he turned to go.

"Wha'd'ye mean by that?" demanded the other, with heavy curiosity.

"It's like an English joke," Jim retorted, "liable to strike you all of a sudden. Good night."

Next day he quietly awaited events. The repeated cable had arrived and uncle's first move would be to go to see Hassall. Then would come the fun.

How Jim wished he could be present at the interview at the lawyer's office! He was to hear the tail of it, for a telephone message reached him at the hotel, asking him to go round at once to Mr. Hassall's.

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He found the clerks' office full of wondering, half-scared underlings, who were listening to an angry seafaring man for the first time in their innocent lives.

In the sanctum, things were worse. Hassall was almost as angry as the little mariner, who was dancing with inarticulate rage.

When Jim arrived, his uncle turned on him with fury.

"You dirty young scoundrel, you—you swindling rogue, I'll have you where the crows can pick your bones. You'll be wrung so dry that you'll cough dust. You're a rascal—"

"Just take a note of those expressions, Mr. Hassall. They'll cost him five thousand dollars apiece. Here, Uncle James, if this interview is to go on, you'll have to take a close reef in your tongue. You're dirtying a very respectable office. Now what's all the poppycock about? You give me the impression of being excited about something."

Hassall turned and spoke to Jim.

"There's some misunderstanding. You are representing the Cochrane corporation, are you not, Mr. Cochrane?"

"I? Not on your life. I'm representing myself. I thought I'd made that clear," he explained.

A puzzled look came into the lawyer's face.

"But you brought me the cablegram the corporation had sent you, and our whole dealing was on that supposition," he said.

"Just what I said. He's a swindling scoundrel—always was," burst out the savage little man.

"Perhaps I'd better explain. I think I see what led to the little misunderstanding. But if my relative is going to dance a polka mazurka all the time, I'd better wait till we can get some one to secure him," Jim remarked severely. "I'm a business man, and I detest seeing such total loss of control, when a big deal is under discussion.

"Here's the position. I got a telegram from Mr. Horrocks, giving me a tip as to certain requirements in the shipping trade.

"Now, I thought it extraordinarily decent of old Horrocks, especially as he hadn't seen me for some time, but I am a business man, trained under a master who insisted on taking every advantage that offered. Don't glower at me, Uncle James. This means you.

"So, naturally, I didn't wait for the corn to spring up under my shoes, but made inquiries as to available tonnage, which brought me in touch with Mr. Hassall. I found that he had the ships. I had the money. We came to terms. I certainly told him I was only the nephew and not the world-famous James Cochrane himself, didn't I?"

"You did, but—"

"As you say, I did butt. That's the way to get on. And I hold an option which expires in three weeks' time."

"I think that that option was obtained under a misconception, sir," said Hassall.

"Not by me," retorted Jim.

"In law it would hardly stand—" began the cautious solicitor, but James cut in:

"You try to block me exercising that option and I'll sew you up in a tighter injunction than the one you've just got rid of," he promised.

"I'll take all the consequences of your refusal to honor the option, Mr. Hassall," spluttered Uncle James.

Jim took Horrocks's cable from his pocket and read aloud in a meditative way.

"'Heavy penalties breach. Last day August tenth.' Long before you've got anywhere with your suit you'll be liable for penalties for demurrage. Now, I've a better plan than that."

"What's that?" snarled the helpless Cochrane, Sr.

"I'll let you use these ships. In other words, I'll turn my option over to you—"

"D'ye mean that?" asked the eager old man.

"At an advance in price of say, two pounds a ton," finished Jim, and he laughed at the impotent fury of his relative.

"I'll see you damned first," he shouted.

"Really, I think—" began Hassall deprecatingly.

"Very good; you refuse ten dollars advance, suppose I say fifteen."

"Not a cent," howled the outraged uncle. "It's a hold-up, pure and simple."

"Pure, perhaps, but not simple," Jim

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murmured. "I'd like to know what you propose to do?"

"I know you can't take this option up. You haven't the dollars. Hassall, you've been done. This feller's no good, I tell you."

"You won't know whether I can pay till the option expires, and I guess that you'll be expiring about the same time, if you find that obstinacy and temper have landed you and your corporation with damage suits for delay. I guess I can stand it if you can."

Jim was imperturbable. The other raged. The lawyer looked nervous. His own position was worrying him.

"I'll charter other vessels," vowed Uncle James.

"Run away and charter, then," was the unfeeling reply. "The thing's dead easy. Just take the first turning to the left, then keep on down Main Street. The first ships you see will belong to you. Oh, they're lying round loose, plying for hire like taxi-cabs."

Jim's loud chuckle infuriated the old man, and he shook a trembling fist under his nephew's nose.

"You'll pay for this. I knew you'd go to the devil. I'll fight you if it costs me every cent I've got."

"You'll enjoy your stay in this fine climate, while the lawyers get rich, Nunky," was the cool response, "for the case will be tried here, right where my business is going on all the time. In the mean time, my ships will be earning their keep and a bit over. You'll be wanting to see a lawyer, so I'll not keep you. You know my address."

With a nod Jim left them, and hummed a gay little air as he took his way through the outer office.

He felt quite easy in his mind. Hassall wanted his money, and had no sentimental desire to see the older man get the ships, and Jim judged that a night's reflection would show his uncle the futility of losing a large sum in penalties, when he could get the tonnage that was so indispensable to him by paying the price his merciless nephew demanded.

He told Mary something of the tussle of wills that was developing. The bride had seen the awesome old man at a safe distance and had declared that he wasn't so bad after all. Like every true woman, she was bent on taming the ogre. And Mary was as full of the wiles of woman as most of her sex.

That evening about nine o'clock there was a timid tap on the door of the ogre's castle, and a quailing figure entered when the booming voice bade her come in.

"I'm Mary," she announced with a quiver.

"That's interesting, and I suppose, in its way, important, for somebody, but not me," was the ungracious response. "You've got to the wrong room, young woman."

"N-no, I don't think so. You're Jim's uncle, aren't you?"

There was a threatened volcanic eruption at the mention of Jim's name, but a lingering respect for the sex his wife had belonged to caused a slackening of the rumblings.

"That young scoundrel's wife, if that's what you are, can have very little hope of a talk with me. What do you want?"

"Why, I was frightened of you. But I'm not now. You do make noises. But when one gets a good look at you, one sees you've got tender eyes. Oh, Jim was right after all."

"Oh, he was, was he? That's surprising. So I've got nice eyes, have I? That's news." The rumblings commenced again, only this time they bore a faint resemblance to laughter.

"Jim said that you were given a bad name, like the dog they hanged, you know, but that you were a good sort at heart. He says that you really laid the foundation for his business success."

"So he's a success, is he? Wonders will never cease. And how did he make his money?"

"Oh, he's so clever. He knows all about when it's good to buy, don't you know—in the market, I mean."

"What do you know about markets?"

"Only that they go up and down. It's great fun watching them do it. We look at the reports, you know. May I sit on the arm of your chair, Uncle Jim?"

She perched herself there without waiting for permission, and the grim old face grew a thought softer.

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"And do you know what this Jim of yours is doing now?" he asked her, while anger again creased his brow.

"Only that he bought some ships for you. As soon as he heard you were coming, he said he guessed why. I made him promise that he wouldn't do anything to stop your business. I thought he might, because he was cross at what you told him once, about going to—well, you know. But he promised me he would buy the ships for you. Jim's very good, I think. Don't you notice an improvement?"

"I can't say it's struck me very much," confessed the old man, but his tone was less harsh. Perhaps this was because some people are mesmerized by the constant passing of a hand through their hair.

"But I'm cross with Jim to-night, and that's why I felt sorry for you. He's broken his promise."

"What's he done now?" growled the basso-profundo old salt.

"He promised me about those ships, and he's going to sell them to some one else after all. I heard him when he thought I wasn't listening."

"The devil he is! Are you sure? Where is he?" The uncle was on his feet, and his eyes shot fire.

"Oh, what's the matter, Uncle Jim? He went down-stairs."

Mary followed the flying figure of Uncle James and caught him up in the lounge. Jim was there, talking earnestly with a young man whom the reader already knows as Bunny Harding. Out of the tail of his eye he saw his uncle approach.

"Not a penny less," Jim was saying when the old man got near enough to hear. "I can easily get that. Ships are scarce."

"Give me till to-morrow," begged Bunny, but Jim was adamant.

"Take it or leave it," he domineered.

"Well, then, I guess I'd better say—" began Bunny.

"I'll take you at the figure you quoted this morning, damn your extortion," interrupted Uncle James rudely, while several heads turned to look.

"Excuse me, I prefer doing business with people who are less violent," said Jim stiffly. "I don't want to be fighting all the time."

"You don't want me to kiss you, do you?" fiercely demanded the peppery relative.

"God forbid," said Jim, "but if I chartered these vessels to you, there'd have to be a certain amount of intercourse between us, and I'm a plain business man, with no time for sparring-matches."

Uncle James reflected, and a soft hand stole on to his arm, and gave it a little squeeze.

"Be nice to my Jim, uncle. He likes you, for he owes his training to you. He's got a temper, but you and I will break him of it."

"I guess we'll get along as well as most relations. The boy has certainly made good. And he made a sensible choice in a wife."

He got a quick squeeze of thanks, and Mary said:

"Now shake hands and then come to our room. We'll have a little family supper."

Over the latter they grew almost cordial and few of his friends would have known Uncle James Cochrane, as he put a knotty old arm round Mary's waist and said:

"I've been thinking, Jim, that we're too far from Australia to do good business. There'll be a big increase after the war, and if you care to take on the management of the Australian office of the Cochrane corporation, why, I shouldn't wonder if you made good."

"That's very decent of you, uncle. I don't mind putting what profits I make out of this deal into the corporation."

"But you're not going to fleece your old uncle af[illegible]e forgiven you so handsomely?" Uncle James looked more sorrowful than angry.

"It was you who taught me how to become a business man, but I tell you what, I'll split the profit with you. Does that go?"

"You're on, my boy. And my half goes to this little woman for a wedding present. Who knows, perhaps it may help to educate a youngster or two—"

"Uncle certainly has come across, Mary," was Jim's reply, and the two Jims gripped hands.

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The Log-Book

By the Editor

WHAT reader is there who does not delight in the lightning play of rapier against rapier, in the zip and zing of steel upon steel, the fierce encounters of true gentlemen, and the noble deeds of the fair women they fought for in the old romantic days before the graceful and sportsmanlike art of sword-play gave way to the brutally uncouth crash and rending of bullets?

In the next issue we will start a serial that not only tingles with life and action of the days when brave men were quick to uphold their honor and the honor of their women at their sword's point, but which is positively unique in another respect.

"THE SWORD LOVER"
BY MAX BRAND

is a story that centers about the most marvelous sword in the world; a shimmering blue and white weapon that caught the light upon its myriad filigree lines and flung it back as though it were a jewel; a marvel of forge work that sunshine glittered and danced on as if in love with the wonderful metal and the exquisite art that had fashioned it. It is a sword that might well win the love of its owner, who secured it from a beaten adversary in the mysterious East, where he had gone, a gallant soldier of fortune, to do battle with the swarthy infidel. With it in his hand, *Colin Ornald* is invincible. He loves it as an ordinary man loves a woman.

The story opens in London in the time of King George III, but thereafter the scene shifts to Virginia, to the town of *Colin Ornald's* birthplace, which at that distant date was but a small hamlet grown up in the midst of a bandit-infested wilderness.

As the tale progresses a woman comes into the sword lover's life; a woman whose grace, beauty, and fiery spirit transcend the gifts of other women as *Nicolette* transcends all other swords. *Ornald* is not lightly weaned away from love of his blade to love of a woman; and when he is, he finds that the woman, like the sword, is not to be won by ordinary means.

"ANNEXING BILL"
BY EDGAR FRANKLIN

to appear next week is a remarkable complete novel dealing in millions, love, and a literal case of "letting George do it." *Enid Barwell* has been left a fortune by her Aunt Jane, but the money makes her miserable because she knows it is keeping the

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man she loves from avowing himself. So she calls on her friend, *Maude Frayne,* to help her devise means by which she may lose it and thus clear the way for *Bill Dow* to come back to her. *Maude* declares there is no better means than her husband, *George,* through whose hands money always slips like water. And thereupon the unexpected happens and trouble begins.

Can you imagine a young woman, angelic of character but seemingly condemned by her homely features to an unloved existence, suddenly becoming the matrimonial objective of not one but several men? And she had not inherited one cent of money, either. In "THE BUTTON QUEEN," an Arizona tale by Will H. Robinson, to appear next week, the story of *Agnes-Marie* and how her love for any and all varieties of buttons enabled her to steer her kind heart through numerous love-shoals to a safe haven, is told with a rich and piquant humor that will cause many readers to lay it aside for a second reading.

Another of the many attractions in THE ARGOSY for November 10 will be "ULYSSES AND THE OPTIMIST," by Paul Steele. It is one of those stories that, while humorously written and entertaining in the highest degree, contains a punch, calculated to make the most thoughtless reader sit up and take notice. Grant's Tomb on Riverside Drive, and the story of that great man's career, have been a source of inspiration to many. How it affected the lives of two hoboes, one clad in rags and the other in Shantung silk, who used its portico for a bedchamber, makes the sort of story that lingers in the memory.

Ordinarily one does not connect revolutions with lavender dresses, but in "A REVOLUTION IN LAVENDER," a short story by Lotta Adele Gannett, which will appear in the next issue, we are shown how the lack of that small article of woman's wear stirred up a rebellion which, if not exactly on a par with Russia's historic upheaval, nevertheless wrought considerable havoc—also a few smiles—before it was finally subdued.

WHY THE LOG-BOOK?

I wonder how many others besides Miss Marcus have passed by the Log-Book because they were not certain that it was the sort of thing in which they were likely to be interested. The Log-Book was chosen as the title for the editor's chat department because of its appropriateness to a magazine whose name meant a treasure-ship of stories. As the log is the captain's record of what happens during the voyage, so the log of THE ARGOSY tells of what the passengers or readers have liked in the past, also of what the captain and crew are arranging for the future. Apropos of what Miss Marcus says about serials, you must bear in mind that when she wrote, she did not know that THE ARGOSY was soon to become a weekly, so I shall hope to hear from her again.

Montreal, Canada.

I have been reading THE ARGOSY for the last five months, but never paid any attention to the Log-Book until now when, having finished all stories and serials as they run in rotation, I noticed at the end of the list of contents "Log-Book," and do you know what I thought first that was? (Now, don't laugh at me, Mr. Editor.) I thought it was a book written by the captain of a ship that went down, and was getting ready for a good long cry, when, behold, your Log-Book was something altogether different, and I had to save my tears for another occasion.

I find your Log-Book very interesting, and notice in one of your letters that you wish to know how the different readers became interested in THE ARGOSY. Well, here is how I came to get acquainted with your magazine. I was mighty hard up one day, and nevertheless crazy to read some magazine stories in order to chase away the blues, and as I only had ten cents in my pocketbook I looked over the different magazines and chose yours because it cost just the amount I had on hand, and also because the titles of the stories looked good to me.

I like your short stories very well, also the serials, but I am not stuck on the latter, because I am reading about five different magazines, and it is pretty hard to remember the beginning of each story, say, three to each magazine "The Devil-Ship" and "Riddle Gawne," the latter especially, are corkers; but after reading the first instalment, I just felt as if somebody promised me a good dinner, served me the soup, and was keeping a fine roasted chicken before my eyes with the promise that I will be getting this next month. However, I am not kicking, as all other magazines run their serials on the same basis.

Mr. Editor, please excuse my babbling so much, but it is the privilege your Log-Book gives its readers.

B. MARCUS.

CALLS THE ARGOSY THE ONE MAGAZINE

Herewith is a letter from a reader who *did* know about the weekly, from receiving a blank

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form for renewal of subscription, and in sending in the money for continuance takes occasion to add congratulations on the weekly issue.

Foxboro, Massachusetts.

A magazine containing such stories as "Riddle Gawne," "A Soldier's Honor," "The Devil-Ship," and too many to mention here, makes THE ARGOSY the *one* magazine. I also take the *All-Story Weekly*, which is an excellent magazine. Am glad to see THE ARGOSY coming into its own by being issued weekly. Here's hoping everybody enjoys the two magazines as much as I.

I remain a constant reader,

E. H. BROWN.

TRIED TO DROP THE ARGOSY IN VAIN

I wrote Miss Harris and told her that we could let her have the back numbers she desired. I am sure that with the excitement of getting a fresh number every week, there is no danger of her again becoming tired of the magazine. Never before in its history have we had such a brilliant array of stories to give our readers.

Indianapolis, Indiana.

For the last twelve years I have been a constant reader of your magazine, until last March I got a notion into my head that I was tired of THE ARGOSY, and would try some other magazines and see if I wouldn't like them better. Well, I made the change all right, and suffice it to say—I want to come back. There is no magazine that can quite come up to THE ARGOSY. Will you kindly let me know if you can furnish me with all the back numbers, starting with March, 1917. If so, I will gladly send money for same. I shall wait for your answer and forgiveness for falling from the ranks.

ETHEL G. HARRIS.

A DIAMOND THAT DOESN'T APPEAL TO HER

Another hearty endorsement for the weekly idea. My thanks to Mrs. Hoobler for telling me how she became acquainted with the magazine. I feel sure she will enjoy it more than ever with the opportunity the weekly form gives to increase still further the wide variety of stories we offer.

Port Chester, New York.

Enclosed please find five dollars for a year's subscription to THE ARGOSY and *Munsey's*. I am going to take this opportunity to tell you I love the old ARGOSY, the only magazine I ever cared much for. As for the stories, I like them all, except baseball stories, and I like the variety. I read THE ARGOSY through from beginning to end, except baseball stories, and I also enjoy reading the Log-Book. It is interesting to know what other people think about it.

I like the idea of a weekly ARGOSY. It really seems so long to wait a month for it.

I became acquainted with THE ARGOSY in 1910 when I was staying with a friend in Columbus, Ohio. She had just bought the November number of that year, and I was attracted by the stories so much that I began taking it and I have kept it up ever since, and now I would really be lost without it. I also like the *Munsey;* the stories are so clean and interesting. I like all the authors equally well. If there is any difference at all, Rex Parson is my favorite. I also used to like the stories by Albert Payson Terhune. It was a story by him that first attracted me to THE ARGOSY. I am looking forward to the weekly ARGOSY. I wish you and the dear old ARGOSY the best of luck in the new venture, and, believe me, I remain, as ever an ardent reader,

MRS. HOOBLER.

CRAZY ABOUT SERIALS

Eight serials would not enable us to give that variety in THE ARGOSY which, as our readers tell us, is one of its chief charms. But fresh instalments coming along as quickly as they do in the weekly form, I am sure Mr. Rankin, who wrote before he knew of the new departure, will be thoroughly satisfied with the five or six we intend to keep going.

Boston, Massachusetts.

Will you please mail me for the enclosed sum a copy of THE ARGOSY for October, 1905, containing the complete novel by Garrett Swift, "Guarding the Treasure"? I have no fault to find with THE ARGOSY except that you don't have near serials enough. I wish you had eight a month, and I wish that you would give us some more stories by Bertram Lebhar and Seward W. Hopkins.

EDWARD H. RANKIN.

NOW PINS HIS BLUE RIBBON ON CAREW

Lenivers Carew is an American, born in Massachusetts, and long a resident in New York, but he is now at an officers' training-camp getting ready for a commission in the army, having had an extensive experience in the National Guard. I am glad to tell Mr. Davis that I have in hand from him a story that is even better than either "The Keys to Freedom" or "The Great White Wastes."

Dawson Springs, Kentucky.

In extending to you my thanks for your splendid magazine after reading the last number of THE ARGOSY, I would like to tell you of some of the conclusions I have drawn since enrolling as a regular "student" several months ago.

I have read every novel-length story that has appeared in THE ARGOSY for several months past, and it was real interesting for me to sum them all up to-day and pick from them those I estimated as superlative in my estimation.

I don't know where Lenivers Carew hails from, nor I don't know his nationality; but I do know that, in my estimation, he is the best story writer that has ever contributed to your magazine. Therefore it behooves me to say that "The Great White Wastes" and "The Keys to Freedom" are the best stories that I ever read.

You may remember that I have expressed these

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same views about another writer of THE ARGOSY before I read any of Carew's stories, but I was forced to change my views, and I am not saying that I will not be compelled to do so again in the future. However, there is one thing certain, and that is that as long as the stories in THE ARGOSY remain on the standard of Carew's, it is bound to stay at the top in the eyes of lovers of *real* fiction.

W. T. DAVIS.

WHY TWO LETTERS WERE ROLLED INTO ONE

Far from putting me to sleep, Mr. Loescher's letter is so full of pithy comment on THE ARGOSY output that I enjoyed every word of it. Mr. Cook has promised me another story, but it hasn't come to hand as yet. As to Mr. Hopkins's falling off, I'm anxious to hear what the multitude of Hopkins fans will have to say about that. I agree with Mr. Loescher that "The Keys to Freedom" was better than "The Great White Wastes," and I am sure he will find the Kashmir tale far in advance of either of them. Yes, Raymond S. Spears wrote "The Trap-Line Runner."

Evanston, Wyoming.

I guess this is the first letter of mine to go to THE ARGOSY. Well, it sha'n't be the last, if old ARGOSY continues to give me the sort of pleasure it has afforded since Billy Cook's "The Sheriff of Broken Bow."

In your September issue you printed a letter by Miss Bertha Stokes, of Kansas City, Missouri. Now, for once I'm real jealous of THE ARGOSY, because Bert says it's her best pal, and I always allowed I held that distinction. Oh, yes; Miss Stokes and I are old friends, and I sincerely hope we'll remain so for all time.

As for myself, I'm an adventurer, or would "drifter" be the more appropriate word? So that, after all, I enjoy an adventure yarn most.

Particularly I enjoyed Harry Bedford-Jones's "Out of Algiers," "The Gates of Farewell," "Seal of John Solomon," "Comrade Island," "Waters of Strife," *et cetera.*

Then William Wallace Cook—there you have a writer, one whom I can praise always as an adventure writer who held me in breathless suspense in every one of his yarns. Do you recall that hit of many years ago called "A Trip to the Year 2000"? I wish, surely, that Pard Bill would give us another. "Over the Cliff at Point Fermin" was dandy.

Seward W. Hopkins is not there with the stuff lately. He'd better perk up or he'll go stiff. His last, a tale of the West, was decidedly *muy malo.*

"The Devil-Ship" is fair; "Riddle Gawne" is good; "The Great White Wastes" was poor; but "The Keys to Freedom" shows better for Carew.

Let's have a yarn of the West that was, for I'm a product of it, and certainly don't admire these fussy-tale yarns of to-day. In other words, I want a story of men.

Get Raymond S. Spears to come across with a good serial; his story of "Tripping Down the Old Mississip'," in the *Railroad Man's Magazine,* is a corker. I guess it was Mr. Spears who wrote "The Trap-Line Runners."

Now, if this dope hasn't put you to sleep, I, at least, hope it is of interest to you. And, like Miss Bert Stokes, I wish to subscribe myself as an old pal with THE ARGOSY.

I was just in the midst of getting the foregoing ready for publication when an incoming mail brought to my desk another letter from Mr. Loescher, inspired by his receipt of the October issue and his sentiments on reading that THE ARGOSY was to become a weekly. As I am sure you will all like to hear what he thinks about it, you won't mind the extra space the postscript I will make of it takes up.

P. S.—Happened to drop into a news-room in this man's town this noon and spotted the October ARGOSY. I had figured from your hints recently that THE ARGOSY was to be scheduled either as a semimonthly or weekly, and was real anxious to find out if either of my guesses was right. Say, by glory! Certainly I was glad to see it become a weekly, because the serials are what attract me most, and I surely hate waiting a whole dog-gone month for their continuation, for THE ARGOSY is the best Munsey publication going.

"The Rustlers of Radford Ranch" shows up pretty well. I like Wyoming yarns, although I've got about enough of the State itself. Nothing but desert, sand hills, sage, flies, mosquitoes, mesquite, and heat here. Wyoming is by no means the beautiful prairie country some authors love to picture. All one has to do is take a ride over the Union Pacific between Cheyenne and Ogden. If he sees any ranches (cow) and grassy prairies along the route, he'll be doing something no one else did. Sheep have run the cowboys out of here. However, up in the Big Horns and around Lander it is not so bad.

I like particularly "Riddle Gawne." That's *mucho bueno!* And how about a novel by Zane Grey? His "Last of the Duanes" made a great hit with me. I'd admire to read another yarn like "Scud o' the Banks"; likewise something after the style of "Inside Information," "The City of the Unseen," "The Golden Octopus," "Ships of Strife," "The Old West Per Contract," "Men in the Raw," "The Sheriff of Broken Bow," "Castaways of the Year 2000," and "Hampton of the Heights." I'd also like a South American yarn.

And with the way THE ARGOSY is now running, I hope to get a whack at more of this stuff. See if you can get James Francis Dwyer to write another wonder story. He's there, is Dwyer.

So, you'd like to know how I got to taking THE ARGOSY? Well, it's pretty far back, so all I can remember is that Billy Cook's "The Sheriff of Broken Bow" got me. Take it from me, this here Mr. Cook surely is the *best* on THE ARGOSY's staff, with Harry Bedford-Jones a close second. They know what they're writing about.

A suggestion: Give us six serials to an issue, in a run something like this—one Western, one about the sea, another of the movies or big business, still another about the "road" (hobo), then an army yarn, with finally an odd mystery tale. Make the complete novel longer and the short stories fewer. Or you might at various times give us two novelettes. This will be about all for to-night.

WILLIAM RAND LOESCHER.

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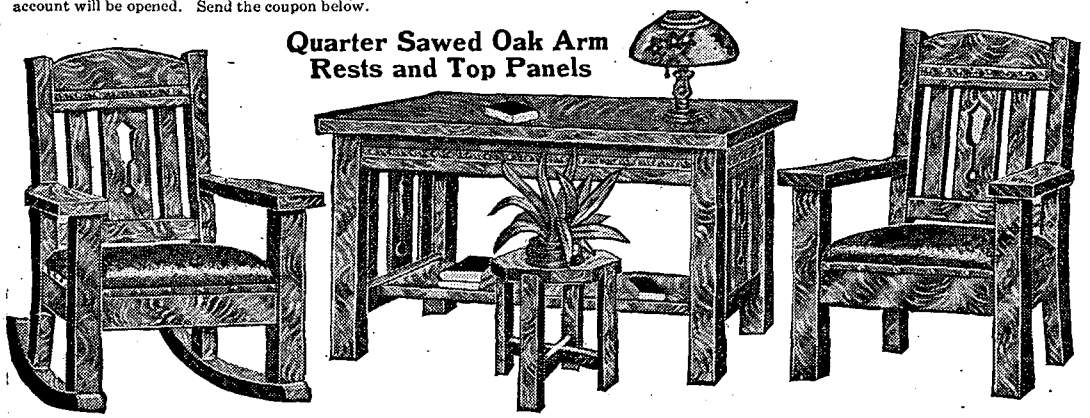

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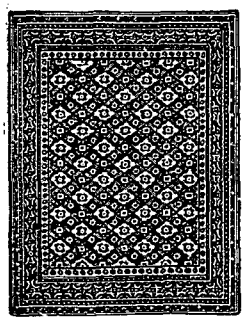

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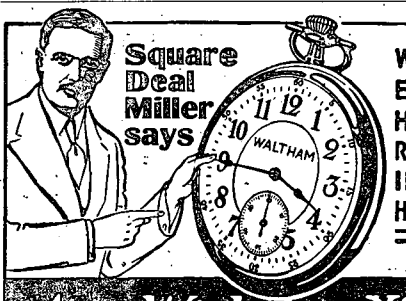

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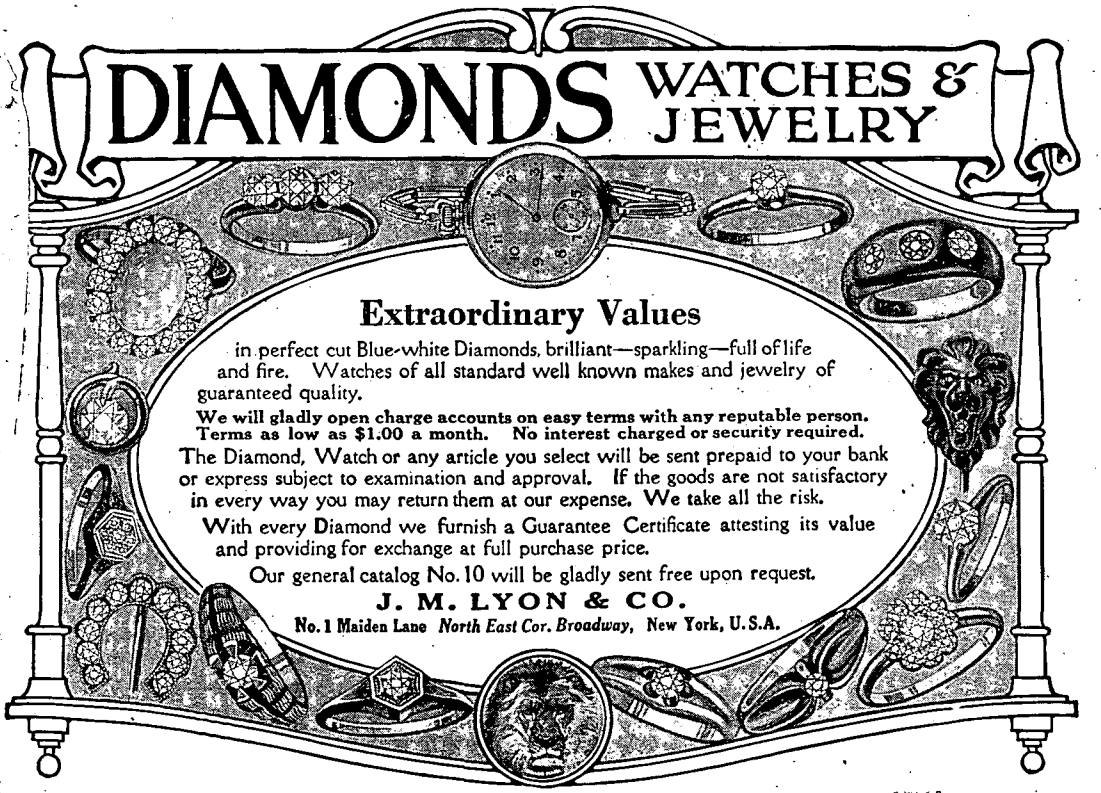

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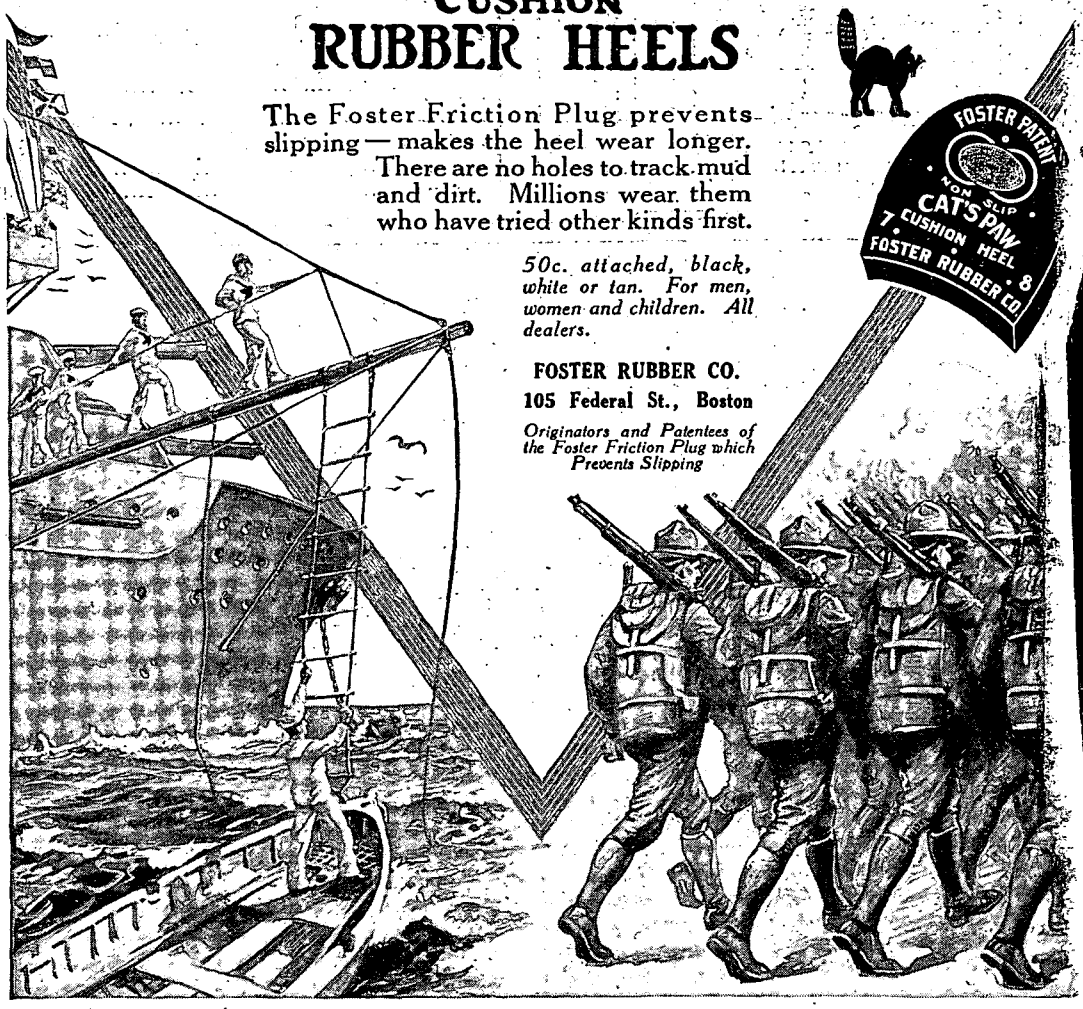

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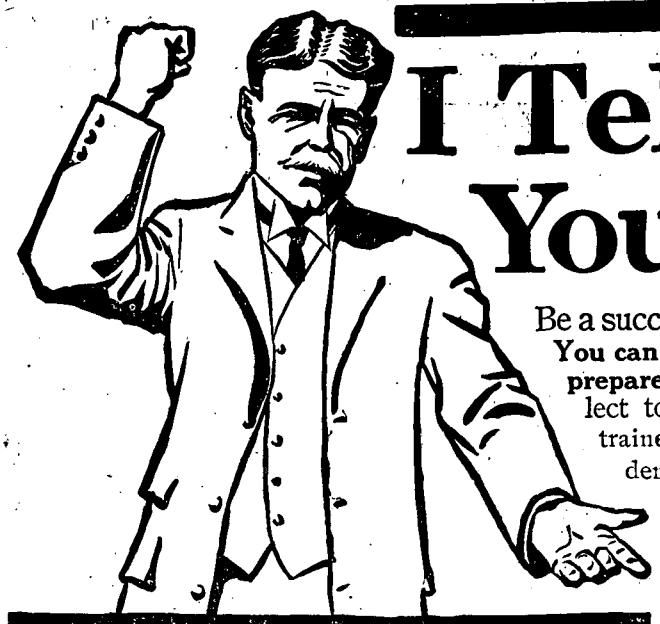

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